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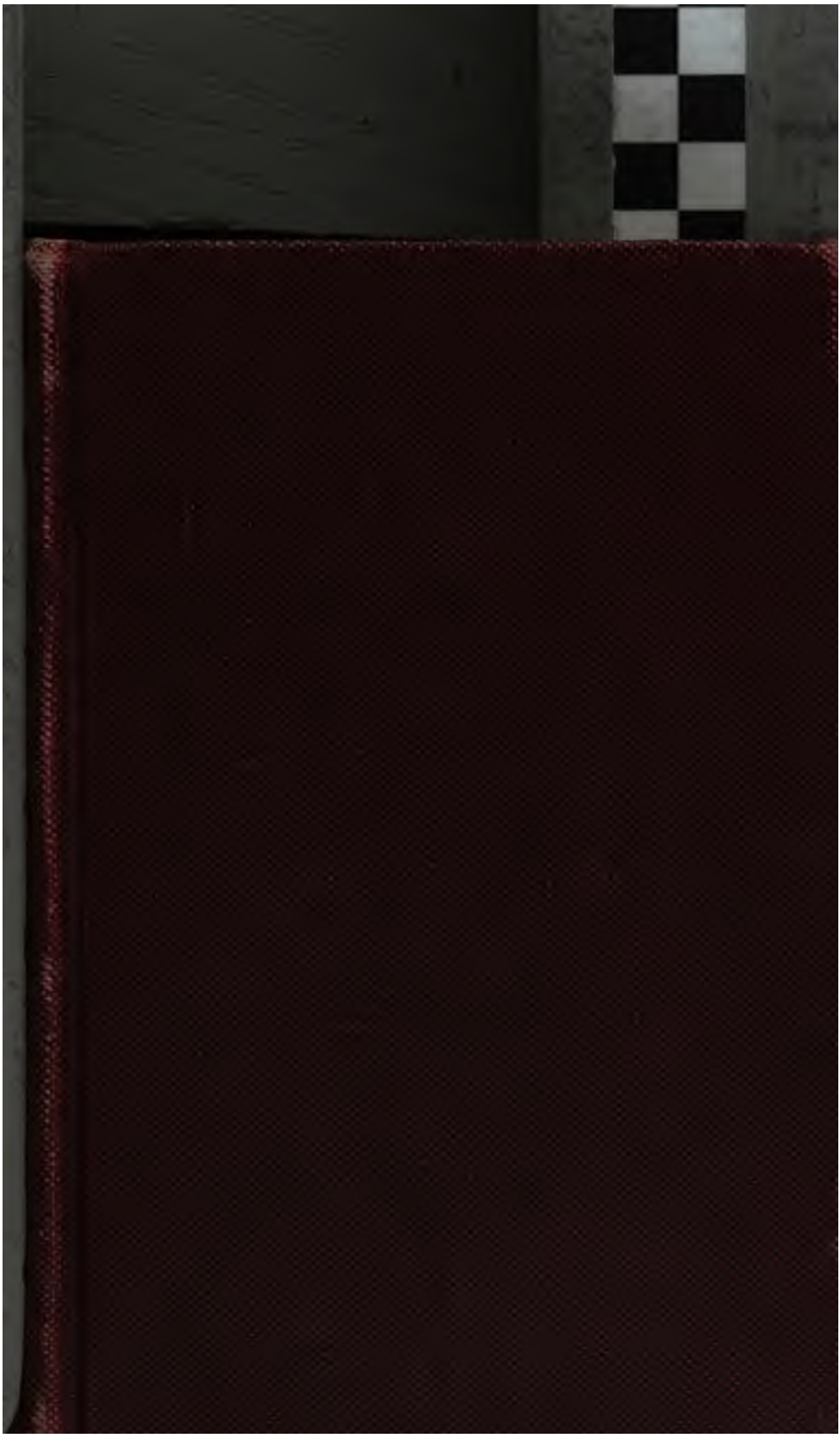

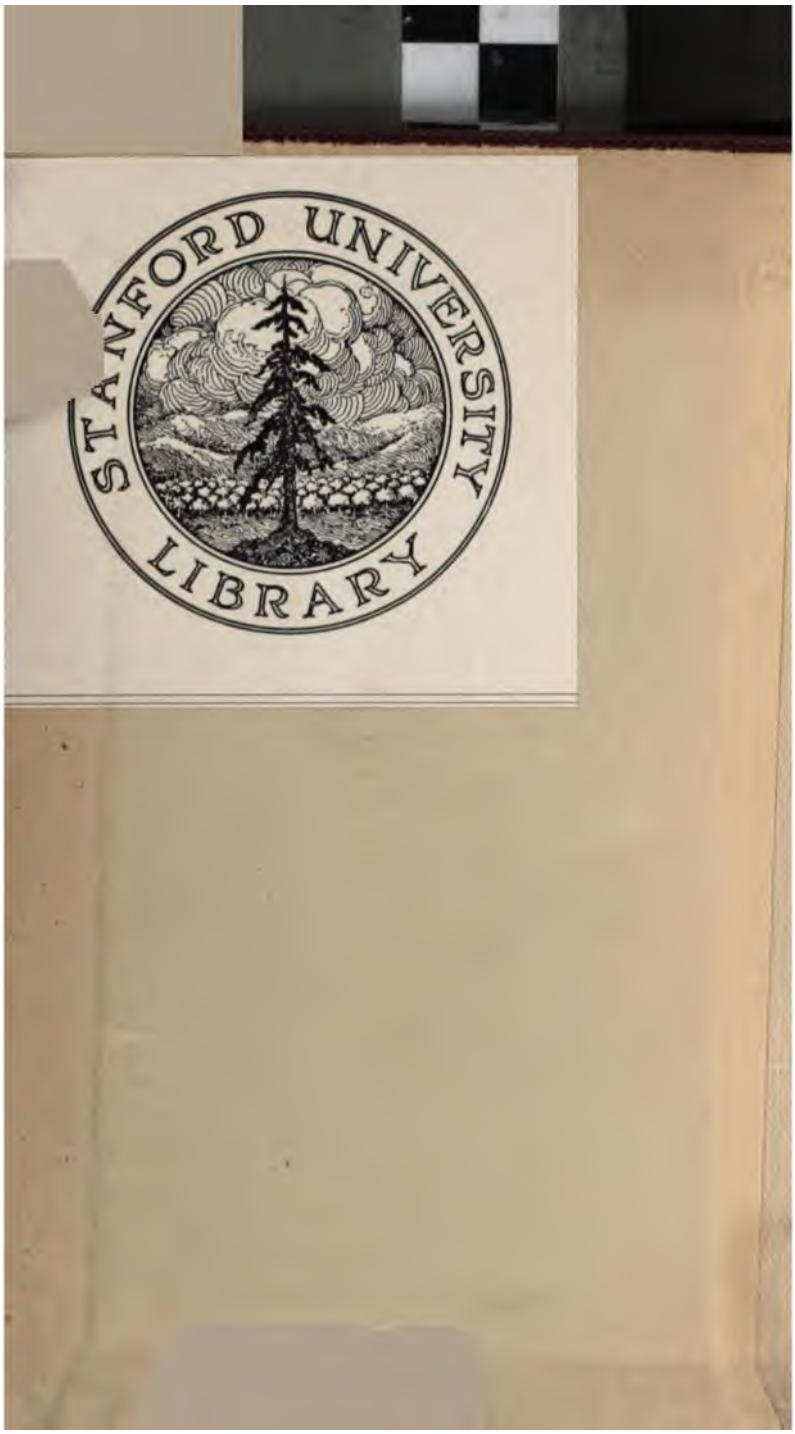
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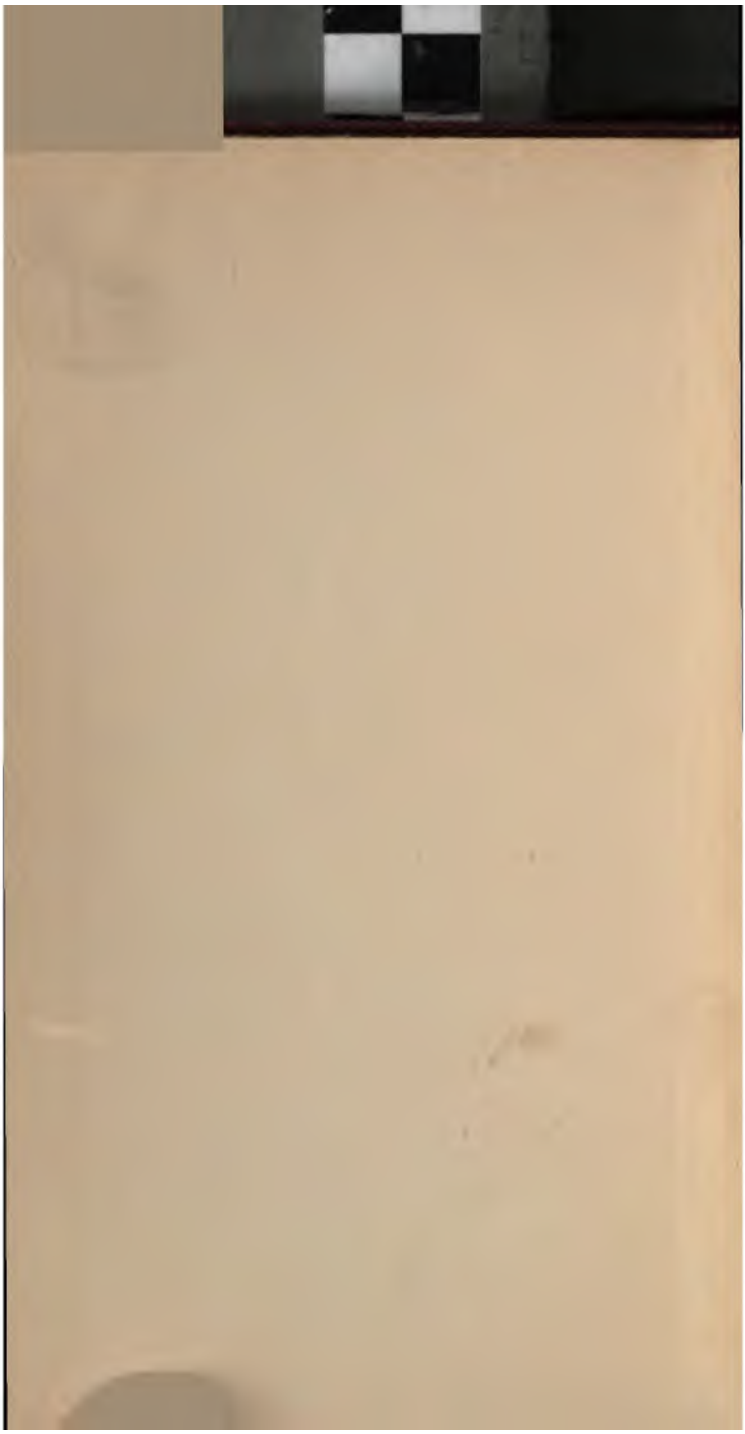

TOWER OF IVORY

A NOVEL

BY

GERTRUDE ATHERTON

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1918

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Set up and electrotyped. Published February, 1910.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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TOWER OF IVORY

I

WHEN BRIDGMINSTER WAS TWENTY-FOUR

JOHN ORDHAM had been in Munich several months before he met Margarethe Styr. Like all the young men, native and foreign, he chose to fancy himself in love with her, and although both too dignified and too shy to applaud with the vehemence of the Germans, he never failed to attend a performance at the "Hof" when the greatest *hochdramatisch* the new music had developed sang Iseult or Brynhildr. He was not sure that he wanted to meet her, for in a languid and somewhat affected manner he persuaded himself that she existed on the stage alone, and that did he even permit his imagination to picture her in private life it must be as a commonplace American woman of German extraction who drank enormously of beer and ate grossly, like the people in the restaurants. And as at that time he cultivated the sensuous rather than the stronger elements of his nature, he avoided what might have attenuated one of the most exquisite of his pleasures. It was true that in the second and last acts of *Götterdämmerung* her tragedy was so stupendous, her grief so poignant, her despair so fathomless, that he turned cold to his marrow, and felt as if the sufferings of all humanity were drowning him. But vicarious woe has all the voluptuousness and none of the hell of Life's cruelties at first hand.

Styr's methods were as likely to inthral the fastidious Englishman as the more artistic German. In a day when

Sarah Bernhardt was the fashion in tragediennes, she had a still method all her own, a manner of appearing quietly on the stage, seemingly as impersonal as a part of its setting; then gradually dominating it, not only by the magic of her great golden voice and imposing height and presence, but by a force, which the critics, after long and acrimonious controversy, agreed to be an emanation from the brain. Whether she possessed also that physical magnetism, commonly indispensable to stage people, was a question still agitated when Ordham arrived in Munich, although she had then been "Royal Bavarian Court Singer" for six years; but that she had cultivated a mental power which above all else made her the great artist she was, the most violent partisans of other prime donne, lyric and dramatic, frankly conceded. Her associates at the Hof told that at rehearsals she merely walked through her part; and Princess Nachmeister, boasting private acquaintance with her since her elevation to the Bavarian aristocracy as Countess Tann, confided to the world that she never practised even those slow, grand, graceful, and infinitely varied gestures of hands and arms which were as expressive as her voice, but directed them from her brain as she did her acting; that she sat for hours thinking out the minutest details, but without moving a muscle until the night of public performance. All facial expression was concentrated in her eyes. She could express more with those features for which Nature had failed to invoke her conventions, than any living actress with physical writhings and distorted visage. Therefore, when she gave way to momentary violence, as, when at Siegfried's repudiation she looked to be tearing her heart out, she created so profound an impression that more than Ordham rose breathless from their seats. Her desolation, her incredulous horror, the alternate pride of the goddess and agony of the woman, the dark and remorseless vengeance of the daughter of Wotan, not only induced a nervous shudder in Ordham but plunged his imagination down the past of this great but forbidding creature, who seemed to unlock her own heart for the *moment* with the reckless indifference of the supreme artist.

He was but twenty-four at this time, but he had seen a good deal of the world, and its inheritances had composed many of his brain cells; he was, moreover, a very clever young man, as all admitted. Nevertheless, when he stared at Brynhildr in her agony and wrath, or dreamed through the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*, he had vague prickings in the depths of his soul that tragedy was not confined to the gods, and uneasy forebodings that life even for such as he was not all roses and cream.

But at this time, although had Styr ever been photographed, he would have framed and enthroned her, he rarely thought of her when not in his seat in the Hof, or listening to the comments of his friends. He was fluttering from flower to flower with the impatience and curiosity of his years, fearful of missing the least the gods provided for fortunate youth; drawn intensely for a day or a week by a beautiful face or an odd personality, but not daring to dally too long lest something more charming escape him. He had passing episodes of a semi-serious nature in that gay scampish underworld of Munich (that world of soubrettes, *kelnerins*, young officers, students of both sexes), as well as in the sphere that revolved about the Queen-mother, but they were by no means ardent or sustained. He had not yet begun to cultivate that outdoor life which makes Englishmen so virile, and in extenuation of his fickleness he reminded himself of the penetrating observation of Marguerite de Valois, that the passions of young men are apt to be wavering and cold. The truth was that he was influenced by what appealed to his mind and taste rather than to his passions, although being sensitive and eager, these could momentarily be aroused by a charming woman who chose to take the initiative. The serious side of his nature had hardly begun its development; youth, bubbling youth, was uppermost; unconsciously (sometimes!) he smiled into any pair of pretty eyes that met and held his rather absent gaze, flirted desperately for an evening with a delightful creature whom he quite forgot to call upon next day. He found life very satisfactory and his studies not too arduous: persuaded by his family to enter diplomacy, and taking to

it as naturally as he turned from the more dubious work of politics, he had spent a year in Paris unofficially attached to the British Embassy; then, a relative being appointed Minister Resident to the Court of Bavaria, he had come to him for another year in order to perfect himself in the German language before attempting his examinations.

It was some time before Munich found him out. For a while he was too much interested in the cafés, the ale-halls, the student life, the opera and theatre, to go about in society, even had it not been away. But soon after the return of the fashionable world to the capital, it became known that visiting at the British Legation was a young Englishman of fine appearance, distinguished family, and excellent prospects: his half-brother, Lord Bridgminster, although still a young man and quite healthy, was, owing to an early disappointment and an accident which marred his features, a misanthropist and misogynist. Almost simultaneously Ordham began to go about with Mr. Trowbridge, the minister; and, to do himself as well as society justice, he was immediately and enthusiastically liked for himself. The glamour of long descent and a possible coronet can never wholly be forgotten, but they carry a man so far and no farther. John Ordham's worldly advantages no doubt were among the earliest of the factors that made him the fashion in Munich, so slow to accept strangers; but later they were but the final excuse to shower attentions upon a young man who, under a shy and languid exterior, possessed an independent and audacious mind, who breathed refinement, and whose gentle and courteous manner charmed even the morose Ludwig to invite him to a private concert at Neuschwanstein, where he and Princess Nachmeister were the only guests. It was there that he met Margarethe Styr.

II

FLYING ARROWS

PRINCESS NACHMEISTER was the most disagreeable old woman in Munich and quite the most powerful. Herself a Prussian, she was a lifelong friend of the Queen-mother, and one of the few women ever admitted to the presence of the King; her genius for social leadership had been cultivated for forty years, and she had a "palace" in the Königenstrasse, whose high-walled garden extended through to the Kaulbachstrasse. Ordham, in his rather listless walks, had often glanced longingly over the flat coping at the grounds, half formal, half wild, crowded with trees and set with Italian seats and fountains, noseless satyrs and empty urns. The princess boasted that she was the first to "discover" him, and after the season opened he found himself dining or attending parties at her house several times a week. At the moment, so great was the depression, owing to the persistent seclusion of the King, that few besides Excellenz Nachmeister had the spirit to entertain on the grand scale. Luncheons, kettle-drums, diplomatic dinners, were not infrequent, and occasionally one of the minor royal palaces opened its doors for a rout; but had it not been for the old lady whom all vilified and courted, society would have been moribund. No one was more aware of this than Excellenz herself, for one secret of her uninterrupted success in a city that still hated Prussia was her genius for seizing and holding the strategic position.

She took Ordham to the routs that were given, to private tea-parties at the Residenz, where frequently the only other guests of the Queen-mother were her ancient ladies-in-waiting, and, in time, invited him alone of all the un-

official young men to her dinners given in honour of the diplomatic corps. She knew that he barely tolerated her, that he came to her house so often, not only because he found much to amuse him there, but because he was far too good-natured to refuse any one that pressed hospitality upon him; but she would have forgiven more to his manners, which she pronounced the finest in the world; and the old court intriguer honestly admired the diplomatic talents which inspired him to express the proper amount of deference and polite gratitude without sacrificing his dignity in the fashion of many that craved something more than a mere entrée to the Palast Nachmeister; then, later, when to be the *enfant-gaté* and the formal man-of-the-world.

Ordham, indeed, began by disliking her intensely. Her thin dispraising nose, which, he reflected, looked as if it had a pin in it; her narrow mouth, whose corners seemed to drip poison; her hard, round, brilliant eyes; her red wig and emaciated figure,—all offended him; but her manifest and disinterested friendship (she had not a young relative in the world), her many favours, and the more subtle influence of Time, to say nothing of her discretion in not inviting him to make love to her, inclined him to indulgence, and he even began to find good points in her,—after his habit with people whom he tolerated at all.

And he was never bored in her house, for he met in it a far more cosmopolitan society than he had been accustomed to in England or even in Paris. The United States had not yet discovered Munich, but it was always refreshed, this beautiful art city of mid-Europe, by Russians, Hungarians, Austrians, Italians, and odd and interesting people from the Balkans and the Porte. Moreover, he loved beautiful things, and the Nachmeister's house was an essential reincarnation of the rococo, even to the dinginess of the gilt, so fatally neglected by Ludwig in his brand-new palaces, Linderhof and Herrenchimsee. Her rooms and her grounds satisfied him so completely that he could not go to them often enough, and he was able to exclude their *owner from his memory* unless she stood in front of him.

Nor did she deny him anything he craved. When the rather nervous young man, who blushed so often, and yet was as automatically sure of himself as only an Englishman of his class can be, told her flatly that he wanted to meet the King, whom no stranger met, the audacity of the request took her breath away, but she managed the interview through the Queen-mother; and Ludwig, who happened to be in one of those intensely lucid tempers when he was sick unto death of shams and hypocrisies, and the vileness he found in the men that cringed at his wavering feet, fancied that he saw in the clean high-bred young Englishman something of the nobility and beauty of his own untainted youth, and impulsively invited him to Neuschwanstein for the following evening.

It was quite in keeping with the curious complications which at this period began to deflect John Ordham's feet from the sunny highway into dim by-paths ending in the mazes of life, that he should have met Mabel Cutting before he made even the bare acquaintance of Margarethe Styr. She was just eighteen, and her mother had brought her to Munich for a few weeks of German and music before launching her into London society. Princess Nachmeister, giving a garden party soon after the squares and gardens of Munich had burst into the vivid young greens of spring, begged Mrs. Cutting, whom she had known for many years, to bring the new American beauty to decorate her "gloomy old park." This with her romantic loveliness — she was tall and slim, her hair was golden, her big eyes were brown, sad, remote, her little nose and mouth cut with the sharpest and most rapid of chisels — Mabel accomplished with much complacency; she was not only quite aware of her charms, but that her smart Parisian gown made the greater number of the Bavarian aristocracy look like housemaids. But she was bored by the strange babel of tongues about her, and, unable to interest herself in the stiff young officers that clicked their heels together in front of her, permitted them to be captured by ladies with whose methods they were more familiar. She was sitting alone, — *save for her pug-dog*, LaLa, — on one of the

curved marble seats under a large tree, flanked by a pink hawthorn on one side and a white lilac bush on the other, when Ordham, who had arrived late, as usual, caught sight of her. A few moments later, his hostess, congratulating herself upon her subtlety, had steered him to the maiden's side and casually presented him.

Mabel enlivened immediately when the tall "boy," as she defined him, very dignified and very diffident, stood blushing before her, and talked so fast that Ordham subsided into a chair with the welcome sensation of being spared all trouble. He was fascinated not more by the sparkling flow of empty words than by the play of dimples in the pink and white cheeks, and the flecks of golden light which the large pathetic brown eyes seemed to intercept from the aureole of her hair. She talked of England and Paris, which she knew far better than New York, "adoring" both, delivered her soul of her hatred of all things German, from the music to the shops, spoke with admiration of his mother who was a great friend of "Momma's," and admitted that she was simply dying to see the inside of Ordham Castle and its romantic recluse, Lord Bridgminster. Occasionally she dammed the stream of her eloquence with a question, answered by a glance from Ordham's smiling eyes. Then Mrs. Cutting, who had been detained within, bore down upon them, and Mabel rose to her feet like a willow branch slowly released from the water.

"Momma!" she cried, "this is Mr. Ordham, Lady Bridgminster's son. I have asked him to call. Do invite him for dinner to-night. He is the very nicest boy I ever met. You are sure to like him, for he talks so splendidly, and says such amusing things."

Ordham had much ado to refrain from laughing outright, and Mrs. Cutting caught the flash in his eyes which made him suddenly look older. He cultivated — or perhaps, in his conventional hours, it was quite natural to him — a somewhat infantile expression, and Mrs. Cutting, observing him from the window, had concluded that he was a mere boy, and quite safe to sit alone with her little daughter at a formal German party. But as she stood

talking to him, — he was now quite at his ease, — this woman whose keen American brain had never for a moment been clouded by passion, whose nerves were mere magnetic needles for the thousand complexities of the world she lived in, experienced a subtle response to something hard under the plastic surface of this charming young man. It was remote, a whisper from the unknown, as evanescent as a quiver along the branches of the tree that cast its shadow on the young pink of the hawthorn; and in a moment she forgot the impression in her general approval. But she recalled it long after, that fleeting response in herself to the germ of ruthlessness under that sincere and boyish desire to please her.

Then and there she made up her mind that he should marry Mabel. The serious quest of her life was the son-in-law who should make her one with the aristocracy she had selected as the best this world had precipitated. She was a woman as fastidious as she was ambitious, for she belonged to the aristocracy of her own country, and there was still much of the Puritan in her, albeit none of the provincial. She would give her immaculate daughter to no man whom she knew to be unworthy, no matter what his rank; and, unsuspected, she had examined and rejected all the young unmarried noblemen she had met during her last two seasons in England. As it happened, she had never met Ordham, although she enjoyed something more than a passing acquaintance with Lady Bridgminster. Always a favourite of fortune, she realized at once that this garden party had been arranged by the august recipient of the prayers she never omitted to offer up when the exigencies of fashion took her to church.

"Certainly you must dine with us to-night, if you are not 'invited,' as they say over here," she exclaimed in her bright cordial voice which retained not a taint of the national crudity. "Mabel is a chatterbox and I shall send her to bed; but you and I will have a delightful gossip about London, from which I have been banished so often these last three years — since my husband's death there has been so much tiresome litigation in New York. It is

a delight even to look at an Englishman once more, especially here in Germany, which — let me whisper it — I hate as much as I love Paris. I am still a good American, you see, even if I did migrate long since to England. And you will come at eight?"

Ordham murmured his thanks, almost as much fascinated by the mother as by the daughter. Mrs. Cutting was not yet forty, very slim, Parisian, high-bred, not in the least faded, and her grey eyes, if cold, were very bright; her small mouth could accomplish smiles dazzling, arch, sympathetic, merely sweet, and she held her head higher than any lady of the court of Queen Marie. Ordham had met Americans of all sorts, but never any that attracted him as strongly as this distinguished couple that said nothing so charmingly and liked him so spontaneously. He felt the utter passionlessness of the older woman's nature, but after the tempestuousness of certain of his foreign acquaintance this but added to her charm. As for the exquisite Mabel, she suggested all enchanting possibilities, although perhaps more than aught else the divine white flame of Wagner's Elizabeth; that is to say (he was dreaming over a midnight cigarette at his window in the Legation when these reflections took shape), she would resemble that exalted ideal when she passed the chatterbox stage, that inevitable phase of the young American female. But, barring the fact that she talked too much and really knew nothing at all, she was quite flawless.

He dined, lunched, drove constantly with the Cuttings during the ensuing fortnight, writing pathetic notes of apology to those that had booked him long since; and as Mrs. Cutting dined in her private suite, his many good friends almost wept as they thought on his sufferings. He answered their notes of sympathy in terms of passionate gratitude and regret (which made him more popular than ever) and gave not a second thought to the writers save when endeavouring to fix each particular excuse in his memory. He was enchanted with his new friends. Mrs. Cutting talked smartly, and on all subjects which she

discovered appealed to him. Mabel was not sent to bed, and a great deal of quiet flirting went on under Momma's discreetly averted eye. Frequently Mrs. Cutting was summoned into an adjoining room by her "dressmaker" (she would not have worn a German gown into her coffin), but certainly Ordham never felt so much as a passing suspicion that the girl was being thrown at his head, nor that his ideals, peculiarities, vague desires, were being carefully sounded and analyzed. When they departed he missed them so acutely for a few days that he was almost melancholy; then, by rapid gradations, forgot them. Mabel bedewed her pillow for many nights, and Mrs. Cutting, as soon as she had opened her house in London, and presented Mabel at Buckingham Palace, devoted herself to ripening her pleasant acquaintance with Lady Bridgminster into friendship. It was not long before those two astute dames understood one another, and the pliant Mabel, by no means without the craft of her sex, was put into training.

III

NEUSCHWANSTEIN

ORDHAM journeyed down to Neuschwanstein full of pleasant anticipations, which for several hours after his arrival seemed unlikely to be fulfilled. Although he and Princess Nachmeister, with whom he travelled, were received at Füssen by a royal coach, which bounded at the heels of four galloping steeds through the grey mediæval town crowded on the banks of the river, then up through the woods to the white castle on its lofty rock, in a fashion that exhilarated his blood, and although they were received at Neuschwanstein with vast ceremony, he learned immediately that the King found himself too unwell to see his guests, and that the Gräfin von Tann would dine in her own apartments over in the Kemenate, where rooms had been put in order for herself and the Princess Nachmeister. In the main body of the castle no woman had ever slept, and few men. Ordham, after ascending to the third story, was conducted through endless suites of rooms, very new, very gaudy, painted with the legends of the sagas and furnished with blue, purple, red, or green satin heavily incrusted with gold. In his own imposing chamber, finding nothing comfortable but the bed — after turning up a corner of the quilt — to sit on (the gold embroideries of the chairs being at least four inches thick), he made his way out of the castle and determined to explore while it was still daylight, half hoping to meet the King or the Styr.

He forgot both for a time while he roamed about what is probably the most beautiful spot on earth. In an undulating valley surrounded by an irregular chain of Alps, the two castles were set on their heights about a mile *apart: Hohen*schwangau, feudal in appearance if not in

fact, old and brown, with citadel, wall, and bastions; Neuschwanstein, a white mass of towers on a mighty rock springing abruptly from the deep gorge of the river Pöllat. Between the castles and on all sides was the dark green forest, separating only for those two jewels of the Bavarian Highlands, the lakes, Alp and Schwan. Down in the lower valley were the old grey towers of Füssen; beyond Hohenschwangau and facing Neuschwanstein, three sharp peaks of the higher Alps glittered with snow. Behind the newer castle a green mountain rose almost as straight as a rampart, throwing the romantic white pile into such bold relief that it attracted the eye from every point of the valleys.

As Ordham wandered about, staring at the castles from all sides, or lying on the turf under the trees of the forest, his solitude broken only by a passing peasant in the picturesque grey and green costume of the Highlands, or the sudden appearance of a chamois at the end of a vista, he understood something of Ludwig's contempt for mere mortals. He loitered on in the groves sacred to the unhappiest man the modern world has seen, many moods sweeping over him, but finally he lay dreaming idly; and, feeling that such romantic solitudes demanded a mate in fancy, since fate was obdurate, he evoked the image of the prettiest girl he knew, Mabel Cutting, and persuaded himself for a few moments that his happiness depended upon seeing her again and at once. He had just resolved to overcome his hatred for letter writing and indite her an epistle on the morrow, when a footman came to remind him that dinner was at seven. Mabel vanished with the chamois, although he made a wry face as he reflected that he was to dine alone in this enchanted vale with Princess Nachmeister.

The same lackey stood outside his door while he dressed, evidently under the impression that he must not be lost sight of again, and this time conducted him to the story above. He had expected as a matter of course that the dinner would be served in one of the smaller rooms, perhaps over in *the Kemenate*, where Excellenz might

have inveigled the Styr to join their little party. But he was shown into a vast room, which was in such a glitter of light that for a moment he was half blinded. Few surprises ruffled his imperturbability, however; and although he appeared barely to glance about him, he observed with much pleasure the immense vaulted room, which was nearly a hundred feet long and almost half as wide, supported on carved columns and decorated with the legend of Parsifal. The ten chandeliers were blazing suns.

At the upper end of the hall a small square table looked like an oasis in a painted desert, with its service of crystal and gold, its candles shaded with pink — no doubt a satiric attention on the part of the King. Princess Nachmeister, very magnificent in pale blue brocade embroidered with silver (which, Ordham reflected, became her hideously), stood by the window and watched the young man with sharp interest as he advanced down the long apartment between the rows of gorgeous lackeys that seemed to await a concourse of kings. She despised the Anglo-Saxon race with all her German soul, believing them to be moderns without subtlety, and never forgetting that they were savages when the Italy of her ancestors was the crown of civilization; but if she had a soft spot in her fibrous old heart, it was for this protégé of hers, and it delighted her to observe that, far from being disconcerted, he had never looked more at his ease. Always, even in his boyish moments, he had the quiet aloofness of those born to the unpurchasable prizes and responsibilities of life, and although he was often nervous and shy in petty ordeals, the centuries that had made him invariably came to his rescue when suddenly placed in positions that shift the ballast of older men of less persistent breeding. Moreover, it is doubtful if the English aristocrat has deference in him for even the royal families of the minor states. He is democratic in manner, partly because it has become the fashion, partly through discretion, partly from sheer careless sense of superiority; but let no one mistake that attitude for humility of spirit or a sense of the universal *brotherhood of man.*

Ordham was not a little assisted in his present ordeal by his slight erect graceful figure, and he always carried his arms better than any man Excellenz had ever seen. She almost blushed with pleasure (poor lady, she could no longer blush) as she noted the respectful wonder on the faces of the lackeys. No doubt they had hoped to enjoy the embarrassment of so young a guest; and a rare entertainment it would have been to them, for the greatest nobles in Germany seldom found access to a castle where the solitary King forgot the world when he could.

Ordham seated himself with a grumble at the short time he had been given to dress. "And my servant is lost somewhere in this barrack," he added (and this was a genuine grievance). "I could not find anything!"

"Tiens! Tiens!" (Excellenz relieved her English with French or German according to the specific gravity of her mood.) "You would have been late if I had sent for you an hour earlier. You were roaming all over the place hoping to meet Die Styr — don't deny it!"

"Why couldn't she dine with us? She is not going to sing an opera."

"But she is going to sing out of doors, and her temper is worse than your own. I had a few words with her, and I never saw even a prima donna in such a state of suppressed fury. Of course she expected to sing in this room, but it seems the King has taken a vow that he will honour the memory of The Master by permitting no more music inside his castles, so — enfin! — he gets round his vow by commanding the great Styr to sing in the open — which, of course, is bad for the voice."

"Why doesn't she refuse — fall ill? I thought that prime donne were never without corns on their vocal chords when determined to have their own way, and that even a King must be prepared for caprice."

"Not this King. Styr did not bring her doctor with her, and she loves but two things on earth, her art and Munich. When his Majesty commands, no excuse will serve. He alone in this realm is permitted to indulge caprice."

"The Styr looks much too imperious to submit to such slavery — disgusting! She could sing anywhere."

"Could she? Richard Wagner has no foothold as yet in either England or America — hardly outside of Germany. Styr's voice would tear the old lyric rôles to tatters — divinely lyric as she makes her Isolde. It is Germany or nothing. And in Germany it is Munich or nothing — for she goes no more to Bayreuth."

"Yes, Munich! — I too love Munich — Bavaria," Ordham said softly, his eyes straying to the mountains beyond the narrow gorge. The windows were open and he could hear the low roar of the Pöllat waterfall.

"Now don't fall into a dream," said Excellenz, tartly. "It isn't often that I have you alone. What a situation — what surroundings! It makes me feel almost young again."

"Then tell me something about the Styr." Ordham sometimes amused himself playing on the strings of the old coquette's remnant of sex. But he always smiled so charmingly that she really did feel younger for the moment. The Nachmeister was never able to decide whether it was his manners or his smile that enabled her to understand the relations between Elizabeth and Essex.

Her fine little nose seemed to rise and point further downward as her round brilliant eyes, whose expression never changed, returned his steady ingenuous gaze. In a moment the corners of her protesting mouth moved upward and she shrugged her shoulders.

"Enfin, mon enfant-gaté! What do you want to know? Surely you hear the gossip of the town."

"All gossip is more or less alike. Is she the King's mistress?"

"That I am sure you have never heard. His worst enemy would not raise the point. I do not know but that I had better carry you over into the Kemenate to-night."

"Great heaven!" Ordham upset his champagne. "Why then does he show her more favour than the other singers — why has he given her a title and a house?"

"Her voice. Her art. Are not those enough — for

this King? He is quite mad over both. One might have hoped for the supreme Isolde, Kundry, Brünhilde, in the course of another ten or twenty years — for has not Wagner revolutionized voices as well as music? — but she burst upon the world full blown. One day she appeared in Bayreuth and demanded audience of The Master. He taught her the great rôles himself; her voice was ready for them — perfectly placed and trained, flexible, sweet, resonant, noble, enormous, three perfect octaves. Wonderful! No doubt he and the King put their heads together and determined that she should leave Bavaria for short *gastspiels* only. But where did she come from? Who is she? Why has she no credentials? Even if lowly born, which would seem incredible did not the most queenly creatures appear now and again among the peasantry, — while as for queens — do not they often look as if Nature, worn out, had peevishly sent her highest back to the soil to begin over again? — Tiens! Genius is no respecter of quarterings — but, even so, why such reticence? Beyond the bare assertion that she is an American she has barely alluded to her impossible country. Why doesn't she invent a plausible story that would put people's imaginations to sleep? Has it occurred to you as odd that she never will be photographed?" she concluded abruptly.

"How fatiguing to think about anything that matters so little!" He had fumed more than once because he could not obtain even a magazine sketch of her. "The ordinary prima donna caprice, no doubt. Or réclame. Such self-abnegation is enough to make any 'artist' notorious."

Excellenz shook her befeathered head. Ordham, fascinated, as he often was by the intensifying of her wicked old face, wondered if visible poison were about to drop from her lips.

"She dare not. Photographs travel. Did hers reach America — and those vaudeville newspapers — cannot you fancy whole pages devoted to her past? They would rake it up in a week. Fortunate for her that America comes not to Munich and *she goes no* more to Bayreuth."

"If she is too haughty to silence slander by an ingenious lie, why should she not be too haughty — too much the artist — to care? She must know that Munich has settled down into the belief that her past will not bear inspection. I have heard that much."

"Ah, but it is all vague rumour now. Never was the woman, not publicly in the half-world, who did not congratulate herself that many people gave her the benefit of the doubt. And whatever Styr was in America, here in Germany she is a goddess walking on clouds. Her voice, her method, her acting, her superb appearance, which yet is not commonplace beauty, above all, her divine artist soul, have made her the idol of the public. In the Hof there are the usual jealousies and intrigues that have driven so many fine artists from Munich never to return, but the influence of the King, to say nothing of her own wit, tact, and will of cast iron, blunt every shaft. She is cleverer than all the good people in the world put together, and I, Olivia Nachmeister, who have seen so many great gifts disintegrate for want of that virile brain-mortar of many ingredients that compels success, greatly respect her."

"And in private life?"

"An ivory statue waiting for the night of a public performance to come to life at the bidding of The Master. When she first appeared in Munich our men shook out all their battered flags of a thousand sieges. They bombarded that ivory fortress with notes, flowers, jewels, even with proposals of marriage after she had demonstrated her imperviousness to the more regular sort. The jewels she sent publicly to charities; of the other attentions she made no acknowledgment whatever. Not a man, barring the officials of the Hof, or perhaps a new composer, can boast that he has been received by her alone. She opens her doors once a month, she goes to routs, sometimes to dinners — at first she went a good deal into society, and, I fancy, was fascinated by it; but no man got a word alone with her. I believe she hates men — but mortally! If this be true, it is significant enough. It may be, however,

that the monotonies of society merely bore her. She is the most intellectual woman I know."

"Intellectual?" She had succeeded in surprising his interest to the surface.

"She has a fine library of her own, and her footman may be seen any day striding between her villa and the royal library — looking very cross. She often attends lectures at the University, and when at home always is either reading or buried in her rôles — when she does not walk. Gott! what a life for a woman under forty! And no one would care if she had a lover. She is a great artist. Does not that give her the liberty of a goddess? What futile regrets when she is my age — sixty!" (Ordham amused himself on rainy days looking up the ages of his friends in the *Graf Buch*, and knew that Princess Nachmeister was seventy; but she was not too old to retain delusions, and fancied that young men were above such curiosities, or that their memories at least were unfeminine.)

"Where does she walk?"

"That no one discovers. I have an idea that she rises at four in the morning, when, of a certainty, she will not meet the gallants of Munich. She is always in fine physical condition, and one would know that she took much exercise — and baths — not too favourite a pastime in Germany! — even did she not allude once in a while to her 'tramps.' But don't lie in wait for her. You would only get a snub for your pains."

Ordham coloured haughtily. He did not like the word. "I never lie in wait for any one," he replied coldly. "Besides, no doubt, she is stalked by a footman."

"None of her servants speak English."

"How is it that her German is so faultless? I am told that before any stories got about she was taken for a German as a matter of course."

"Her parents were Hungarian. Her singing teacher in America was a Hanoverian."

"Has she told you that much?"

"*Now and again I get* something out of her — but

nothing that really counts. To judge from her manner, her carriage, her breeding, she might be a Karoly or a Festetics, but one day when I told her bluntly there was a rumour to the effect that her parents were emigrants, — steerage emigrants, — she replied coolly that she should be delighted if the story put an end to romantic nonsense."

"I should like to believe that she was a runaway — or an abducted — princess."

"So would all the other romantic babies. Unfortunately, we have her word for it that she is an American born — and reared. Of course her policy in admitting that much is to stifle curiosity in her origin — origin in America not counting with Europeans in the least — as well as to discourage curiosity. The place is so vast — ten thousand miles across, I am told — or is it in diameter? — that one might as well look for a lost soul in Hades. She has even admitted that she was on the stage in America. But under what name? That I cannot surprise out of her, and the few Americans I know never saw nor heard of her. They all live in Europe. Of course she never sang over there. She need not tell us that, for if they were still red and wore feathers, they would have made that voice famous in a day."

"What makes you so sure that Margarethe Styr is not her name?"

"Am I a Frau Professor or an old woman of the world? When the King decided that bracelets, rings, even necklaces were inadequate acknowledgment from the first living royal patron of art to the greatest interpreter of the new music, and that she must be raised to the Bavarian aristocracy — Gott! — I was commanded to be her social sponsor. Naturally, with the utmost delicacy, I endeavoured to extract such information as would satisfy the curiosity of her future compatriots. I distilled a little and inferred more. Enfin! I am convinced that the story, whatever it may be, is hideous — but hideous! Who minds a lover or two? — and an artist, as I have said. I know women — ach Gott, ja! and I have studied the Styr far more deeply than she knows. There are certain signs — "

Excellenz lifted her shoulders and curved the corners of her mouth almost to her chin.

"I wonder!" Again Ordham's glance strayed into the dusk beyond the glare. He recalled the curses and the ecstasies of Isolde. A footman changed his plate, and he asked, "How is it that I have never met her, even at a rout?"

"She has gone into society very little this year. I fancy she is now quite tired of it, and that only a royal command could draw her forth. And"—with a sigh—"there is no court, as you know."

"Do the men still pursue her?"

"Not the older men; there are always recruits among the fledglings, but men soon learn the difference between ice and ivory, and life is short."

"I should like to meet her."

"No doubt. But she is more difficult to meet than the King."

"You seem to know her very well."

"Comparatively. But she happens to be the only genius of my acquaintance — of my own sex — and I am never quite at ease with her. I should far more aptly take a liberty with the Queen, to whom, indeed, I am privileged to say *du;* but I have never ventured into that zone of liberty with Die Styr. She is the most majestic, or shall I say, the most frozen, creature I have ever met. Where did she get it? Her origin! Her past! She upsets every theory."

"There are no theories where genius is concerned. And if, in addition, she has an intellect — naturally she dominates. There are so few intellects. D'you see?"

"I do, you impertinent boy! And I shall not even try to present you to her."

"According to all accounts, dear Princess, you should be the last to fear her, for in your society alone does she appear to find any pleasure. Who else can claim to know her? I have heard of no one."

"Again I am assured of your fitness for the diplomatic career! As I *told you, she* was placed in my hands.

I found her little in need of instruction. She seems to have been born with a sort of royal tact — this makes me believe that her parents were political refugees, at least. Perhaps they had disgraced themselves in other ways. Or it is possible that she is the illegitimate offspring of a prince and some pretty little actress who was bundled out of the country. Austrian archdukes have a mania for romantic marriages. N'importe! We have always remained friends of a sort. I rarely let a week pass without going to see her, and once in a while she comes to me alone and sits in my garden — and expresses her scorn of Sardou and her admiration of Ibsen! When I would give two or three of my best memories to hear how many lovers she has had, and what they were like. A woman can always be read through her lovers. Whatever Styr's may have been, her one desire now is to be impersonal. I might as well invoke Brynhildr or Iseult. Perhaps nothing personal remains in that charming casket. Off the stage ivory, on the stage fire. It is all very odd. I have never been so intriguée in my life. Don't try to know her. She might find you worth talking to — and then — who knows?"

Ordham flushed at the bare suggestion. "I am quite determined to know her."

Excellenz noted that his eyes were less infantile than usual. "Well, later — I will take you to one of her routs," she remarked indifferently, determined to do nothing of the sort. "I wonder where this remarkable concert is to take place." She beckoned to the master of ceremonies, and was informed that the prima donna would stand on the Marienbrücke, the narrow bridge that spans the Pöllat at a dizzy height, and that the guests would listen from the windows of the *Festsaal*, or from the balcony of the throne room below, as suited their pleasure. His Majesty would occupy the balcony before his bedroom windows.

Ordham's eyes flashed. "When?" he demanded.

"When the moon rises, sir. In less than an hour."

IV

THE STYR

JOHN ORDHAM stood alone on the balcony before the throne room. Princess Nachmeister, shivering and twinging, had gone over to her own comfortable apartment, where, wrapped in a wadded dressing-gown, she could sit at her window and lose nothing of the concert. Ordham, for some time, was sensitively conscious of an unquiet spirit just round the corner of the castle. He could not hear a footfall, a sigh, but he knew that the lonely King was trying to surrender his tormented soul to the golden flood pouring upward from the white figure on the Marienbrücke, perhaps to the unearthly beauty of the night.

The full moon mounted slowly above the three snow peaks of the distant Alps. It turned even the lakes to sheets of silver, threw forest and unpowdered mountain tops into hard black outline against the deep blue of a sky that seemed to throb with a thousand responsive notes: the golden notes of every human song-bird that Earth had lost. The wind was still. Save for the roar of the waterfall, there was not a sound in the world but that great voice that seemed to fill it.

Ordham had waited breathlessly during the few moments that preceded her appearance, the intense stillness pounding in his ears. Then, by what sleight of body he could not guess, she seemed to dart suddenly up from the gorge below the bridge as she uttered the terrible shriek of Kundry when summoned by Klingsor from her enchanted sleep.

"Ach! Ach! Tiefe Nacht — Wahnsinn! — Oh! — Wuth! — "

Ordham fancied he recognized a note of genuine anger in her wild remonstrance, a bitter personal reproach. But she was artist before all, and when she passed on to her scene with Parsifal, her dulcet reminiscences of his infancy when she herself seemed to brood above him, the helpless anguish of the desolate wife and adoring mother, the maternal agony when the boy ran from her out into the world, the waiting, the savage cries of despair, the "dulling of the smart," the ebbing of life — the strain of exquisite pity in which she told the youth that he was alone on Earth — Ordham shivered more than once, staring back into a brief past where he could recall little of maternal love, wondering how much he would care if he never saw his mother nor any member of his distinguished selfish family again.

The echoes gave back Parsifal's brief lament; then the tall white figure on the bridge, although she did not move, seemed to bend her voice above the kneeling boy, summoning him to consolation. As it rose in seduction, in the insolent triumph of the passionate woman who knows that not for her is the balking of desire, it was so warm, so rich, so vast in its compass, that Ordham felt as if the golden waters were rising to suffocate him. When she paused so lingeringly on the final note of seduction, "*Ersten kuss*," that the words seemed to live on and gather volume in the thrilling rebellious ear, and an angry cry burst from the balcony of the King: —

> "Amfortas! —
> Die wunde! Die wunde! —
> Sie brent in meinen Herzen —
> Oh, Klage! Klage!
> Furchtbare, Klage! — "

he came as angrily to himself. It was the spell whose meshes he cared least to encounter, and he wondered how he could be sensible to it, even under the influence of music, so soon after breaking from an entanglement which the lady had taken with a seriousness incomprehensible to himself. He was in a mood which impelled him to close the eyes of the lover in him forever, and his real interest in Margarethe Styr began when the Princess Nachmeister told him that

she was a woman of intellect and hated his sex. He by no means hated hers, but his mind was lonely, and his ego sought blindly for that companionship which all souls claim as their right, and generally go forth to other worlds still seeking.

The voice of the King ceased. Kundry burst forth again. The wild grief, the remorse of her awakened soul at her abandonment of Christ, then her passionate supplication for the joys and compensations of mortal love, hardly removed the impression, nor her promise to make the obstinate youth a god in her embrace. But when she hurled forth her curses, Ordham breathed more freely, although the furies of hell seemed to echo among the hills.

There was a brief pause. Then with a wild and startling transition : —

"Ho-yo-to-ho ! Ho-yo-to-ho !
Hi-ya-ha ! Hi-ya-ha !
Ho-yo-to-ho ! Ho-yo-to-ho !"

Brünhilde's jubilant cry sprang from peak to peak; then this strange woman's vocal interpretation of the gulf that separated Wotan's daughter from her sisters even before the War-father bereft her of her godhead; the gathering clouds of her approaching humanity; the eternal tragedy of woman's sacrifice to man.

Styr passed from opera to songs, all, no doubt, selected by the King. Some were sonorous with deep religious feeling, others a long-sustained chaunt of sadness and despair; one alone was insolent with triumph and power. It seemed to Ordham that he was swept upward to the stars, those golden voices of dead singers once as great as this virile creature below him. His body was cold, his pulses were still, his brain was on fire. He had a vision of himself and this woman swirling together on a tide of song through the infinite paths of the Milky Way — invisible to-night under the violent light of the moon — then — up — up — through the gates of heaven —

But he was by character and training too cool and self-controlled to remain *in a condition* of mental intoxication

for any length of time. He had glanced at the programme handed to him at the conclusion of dinner and knew that the songs were to end the night's performance.

Ordham, constitutionally shy, albeit with the audacity which so often accompanies that weakness, possessed also what Napoleon called two o'clock in the morning courage. He had felt sure that were he suddenly to be introduced to the mysterious Styr he should turn cold to his marrow and long to bolt. But to meet her formally might prove impossible. To-night was his opportunity. He made up his mind that he would talk to her did she invoke the vengeance of the gods.

He hastily made his way out of the castle by the main entrance, ran down the slope of the great rock, skirted its base, and ascended through the forest to the bridge. He believed that the King would retire as soon as the concert was over, and that the singer would remain for a few moments to enjoy the extraordinary beauty of the night.

And so it happened. Styr, her engagement finished, but still exalted with the intoxication of song, after one long look about her, leaned both hands on the railing of the bridge and stared down into the wild depths below. The grip of the bridge on the rocks was none too secure; a landslip, such as occurred daily in the Alps, and she would lie shattered below. But she enjoyed the hint of danger and might have stood motionless for an hour, warm as she was in her white woollen draperies, had not a footstep made her move her shoulders impatiently. She supposed it to be a lackey with a superfluous wrap, and did not move again until aware that some one stood beside her on the bridge. Then she turned with a start and faced Ordham. She knew at once who he must be; Princess Nachmeister often talked of her favourite, and had told her that he was a guest at the castle to-night. His audacity in approaching her and in such circumstances took away her breath. But only for an instant. She drew herself up with a majesty few queens have had sufficient practice to attain. Her height nearly matched his — not quite; he thanked his stars that she was compelled to look up at him; and

she did look the cold astonishment her lips would not frame.

"I could not think of letting you return to the castle alone, Countess Tann," said Ordham, gently, "even if those lackeys were not too stupid to think of coming for you. I am sure this forest is full of peasants; they must have known of the concert. They may be harmless, but as the King's only guest of his own sex, and as he is unable to look after you himself — I am sure you will forgive me. How could I remain quiet in the castle while you found your way back alone? I should be a barbarian."

There was no trace of emotion or even of admiration in his face, merely the natural courtesy of a gentleman, perhaps a touch of boyish knightliness. And certainly he was a mere boy, Margarethe Styr reflected. In that white downpour, that has rejuvenated many a battered visage, he looked — she groped for the word — virginal. And his steady gaze had never wavered before the haughty inquiry of hers. This young man might or might not be as innocent as he looked, but his perfect breeding, which she instantly divined to be an integral part of him, appealed to the woman who had so often found polished manners a brittle veneer. Moreover, she was as amused at his ruse, which had not deceived her for a moment, as she felt herself compelled to admire his strategic cleverness. Then she abruptly asked herself the question that perhaps the immortal goddesses asked in their day, "Why not?" and bent her head pleasantly.

"Thank you," she said. "Of course you are Mr. Ordham. Thank you many times for thinking of me. Shall we walk a little? I should not stand too long after singing."

He was so taken aback by the swiftness of his triumph that diffidence overwhelmed him, and he stammered: "You are sure you would not like another wrap? I can fetch one in a moment."

"I am very warmly clad. Do not bother." She did not notice his relapse and asked him idly if he had enjoyed her singing.

"Oh — enjoy! Please do not tempt me into banalities. It was much too wonderful to talk about. I should like to talk to you — about a hundred other things. I know your voice — I have never missed one of your nights since I came to Munich. But I do not know you at all. This is the blessed opportunity."

He had had time to recover himself, and he watched her intently. Her eyes, which had hung before his mental vision like two tragic suns, flashed with amusement.

"Do you know that I have lived in Munich for six years and not had five minutes' conversation with any man alone, except on business relating to the Hof? Much less have I 'known' any one."

"But you can't go on forever like that. If you weren't fundamentally human, you could not be a great artist; and if you are human, you must crave some sort of companionship. Are you never quite horribly lonely?"

"There is so much in life that is worse than loneliness." Her voice sounded as dry as dust. "Moreover, it is an excellent rampart. But I am not lonely. I work constantly. Why do you set such a high value on human companionship?"

"I don't think I do. I am often glad enough to get away from people. And I fancy I read a good deal more than I talk — and I am not sure that I don't like the theatre quite as well as society. But, after all — there are certain wants — "

"We outlive so many of them!"

"Do we — permanently, I mean? I feel that sooner or later you would have flung down your barriers. It is mere chance that makes me the blessed first."

"I wonder?"

"Whether it is chance or destiny?" He smiled as if at the audacity of his own words.

"Not at all. There is no such thing as chance, or any destiny but that which you make for yourself — that is, after you are old enough to know what you are about. I wondered if the human needs were stronger than the brain."

"I was thinking of mental needs when I spoke. Nothing is more human than the brain. One can get on without love, after one has had a dose or two of it, but not without striking fire from another brain now and again. From one brain in particular, I should say."

"That is a curious speech for so young a man to make."

"Perhaps I should not make it if I were ten years older. For the matter of that, do years count? We come into the world encased in traditions and are only happy when we have shed the last of them."

She liked the way he walked beside her, seeming to protect her down the steep path without touching her. He carried himself with a quiet unconscious dignity, refreshing after the military strut of which she was artistically weary; and as he looked down at her with his kind smile and calm almost studious gaze, he attracted her more than any man had done for half his years. She also felt a curious mental excitement, a desire to talk very fast, which she attributed to the uncommon circumstances, but which she realized before long was the stimulating influence of that rarest of mortal contacts, a sympathetic brain. In days gone by she had found it easy to love, but she remembered few men she had cared to talk to. At the moment she shot up an inquisitive glance. Might he not be older than she had fancied? Nineteen he had looked on the bridge. Possibly he was nearer thirty. But she recalled that Princess Wachmeister had mentioned his age. Young men — with one tragic exception — had never interested her. But she was quick to read the human countenance; and she observed that if his eyes recorded nothing beyond the mood of the moment, the line from ear to chin, under the fine smooth English skin, was uncommonly long. It might indicate future character and present obstinacy; although there were no strong lines yet in the boyish sensuous mouth, soft and pouting in spite of its fine modelling. And [illegible] he had demonstrated that he could seize and hold [illegible]re was no hint of obstinacy in his manner, which [illegible]gentle and diffident. For the first time in her [illegible]xperienced a sensation of gratitude toward a

member of the man sex, a sensation made up of many parts, and rising from dark corners of memory. It impelled her to say:

"Let us sit down. It is quite warm here in the forest."

"You are sure you will not take a cold? I will give you my coat to sit on."

"You will do nothing of the sort. Fortunately, these classic costumes commanded by the King are made of wool. Besides, I always dress warmly to sing in that *Festsaal*. It is colder there than out of doors."

"Nevertheless, you were very angry when you began to sing."

"Did you detect that? I hope the King did."

Ordham, who had stretched himself at her feet — she had seated herself on a bench — looked steadily at her while they talked, wondering if she were beautiful or not, or if it mattered. Her head in poise and form was classic, her face oval, and her rather long nose thin and sensitive. But her eyes — those eyes that looked immense on the stage — were small, deeply set, dark, impenetrable, sullen, like the lower part of her face. Occasionally they lit up with amusement, and hinted of temper and other uncomfortable attributes; nor was there any suggestion of tenderness in the close mouth and strong jaw. In the second act of *Tristan und Isolde* she expressed every soft enchantment of womanhood, and Ordham for the first time fully realized what a great artist she was, for he could see no indication that any traces remained of those impulses that drive the race blindfolded, in this sullen almost angry shell. She looked like a fallen goddess, whom mortal passions had consumed, leaving but a vast regret for her lost godhead. No wonder she could play Brynhildr! There was nothing else in that imposing casket but brain, and although he could imagine the tigerish beauty of her youth, she fascinated him far more as she was. The world was full of soft passionate women — he [illegible] thought of them — and his mind, almost full-[illegible] periously demanded this particular brain as its [illegible] he made no effort to lead the conversation in[illegible]

channels. In conversation, for that matter, he was not skilful, and depended upon the inspiration of the moment.

Princess Nachmeister had said that a woman might be known by her lovers, but he judged people largely by what they read, and he asked Margarethe Styr if she took in all the reviews.

"Not one. To me this high plateau is the world. I do not know who is the President of the United States, or the Prime Minister of England."

"Does your art really fill your life?"

"Almost. And I read a great deal, although no reviews, newspapers, and few novels."

"And is this to go on forever? How do you define the word 'life'?"

"All that I most wish to forget."

"Then if you had not this wonderful voice, you would not live at all," he adventured.

Her eyes gleamed, and for the moment she seemed about to turn the remark aside. But she looked at him unflinchingly, and finally answered, "No."

"Then art does suffice. It is very interesting to learn that."

"It once saved me from death — when I was almost dead. Every one else had succumbed. It was the knowledge of that golden wonder in my throat and the memory of the ecstasy in pouring it forth that kept the breath in my body."

"Tell me about it!" He sat up eagerly.

She shook her head. "I never think of it. I cannot imagine what has brought it to my mind to-night." She bent her head and looked at him keenly. "Yes, there is a slight resemblance," she added thoughtfully.

"You are unfair. I am mad with curiosity. Tell me. Tell me."

She asked him abruptly: "Do you find that I have a cent? It is seven years and more since I have h any one of my own tongue, and I am curious

colour rather than an accent — that is to say —

I always express myself very badly — as if you had dyed your native American with brown and crimson, and at the same time rounded off the thin edges. But I should not take you for a German. Is that what you wish?"

"Not in the least."

"But Princess Nachmeister intimated that Munich was the passion of your life, or something of that sort."

"Well, it is one of them, certainly; and for a while I was so grateful to Germany, so enchanted with my new life, that I deliberately tried to make myself over into a German, put myself into the rôle, as one does on the stage. I succeeded for a time, but all that is past. Once an American always an American, I fancy. And the longer I live in Europe the more American I become. Don't ask me to define this. It is merely an instinct — perhaps a jealousy of birthright. I may never return to the United States. I know nothing of her affairs. But — well, my essence was compounded in that great country. She could put Germany into her pocket and not hear it rattle. It may be that — the physical vastness of the country — that holds me. I am only thinking out loud — I have never attempted to analyze why I finally admitted that Europe could inspire me with everything but a new patriotism, but I have a fancy that it is only snobs that become thoroughly Europeanized. Titles are a form of intoxication to republicans as well as to the bourgeoisie of monarchical countries. But after all, they work less harm than absinthe and cognac, so why be too severe? If one must have human weaknesses, let us be content merely with making fools of ourselves and save our livers and our nerves."

Ordham laughed. "I was sure you were a monster of charity! But I hardly understand your loyalty to the United States. If your blood is Hungarian, what matters your birthplace? No Englishman feels a sentiment for the American flag because he happens to have been born under it."

"Who told you I was of Hungarian parentage?"

"Everybody."

"My mother was a Hungarian — emigrant

caused that story to be circulated about Munich, for I was tired of their nonsense. If you have any curiosity on the subject — I have not the vaguest idea who my father was. My mother, I have reason to believe, was of aristocratic blood on her father's side, but she was a natural child, of course, and a vagrant."

"Are you trying to disenchant me?" Ordham felt a little angry; he was, in truth, too much of a Briton and a born diplomatist to relish such plain speech.

"Perhaps. But, to be quite honest, not entirely that. It is rather a relief to fling the bare facts into somebody's teeth. When you have been shut up within yourself for many years, it suddenly becomes necessary to lift the lid and let the steam escape. Of course I cannot give all the facts to the public. It would not be fair to the King, in the first place. Moreover, when I set foot on German soil and assumed the name of Margarethe Styr, it was with the firm intention of beginning life over again. I had no scruple about holding my tongue on many subjects. I brought to the Germans the equivalent of all they could give to me. We are quits. I experience a kind of defiance now and again, a desire to assert my complete liberty and independence by proclaiming the truth from the housetops. But of course I do nothing of the sort."

She did not ask him to keep her counsel, and he volunteered no promise, two facts that must have struck them as significant had either been in the analytical temper. But Ordham was wondering if she would ever tell him the whole story; and she, if the excited stir of her mind were due to the unwonted occurrence of talking to a young man alone in a forest at night, after eight years of almost complete disassociation from his sex; or if it were merely the usual nervous aftermath of song. But she had no time to define her sensations at the moment. There was a rapid step in the forest. Out of the shadows emerged the King's personal footman, Meyr, who announced that his Majesty's coach was in the courtyard, ready for the customary midnight drive, and that his Majesty requested the pleasure of the company *of the Gräfin* Tann and Herr Ordham.

"I won't go," said Ordham, in English. "I wish to stay here and talk to you. Please don't get up."

"Not even for the pleasure of talking to you would I risk being dismissed out of Bavaria to-morrow. This is the sovereign that takes no excuse. And why should I deny him? Has he not made me what I am? And do you realize that a great honour is being conferred upon you? — upon us both? So far as I know, he has never invited any one to drive with him at night before."

"I will go for the sake of remaining with you, and only hope it may prove half as interesting as our talk would have been."

He walked beside her down the hill, grumbling all the way. In the upper courtyard was a large open coach, bountifully gilded, to which six white horses were harnessed. On two were postilions; an outrider carried an unlighted torch. A footman was on the box beside the coachman, but there was none behind. Ordham's eyes sparkled as he put on without further protest the overcoat and hat with which his apologetic servant awaited him; and had they been less under control, would have danced a moment later when the King's valet came hastily from the castle with the announcement, which surprised no one but the English stranger, that his Majesty found himself too indisposed to go out that night, and begged that his guests would use the carriage at their pleasure. Countess Tann, whose maid had muffled her in a white hood and cloak, half turned from the coach, but she suddenly found herself handed in and Ordham seated beside her.

"This is quite wonderful!" he cried, as the horses seemed to make a flying leap over the drawbridge. "And I thought this visit was to be a failure. Blessed be the fates!"

And in spite of all that followed he never recalled that pæan.

V

ORDHAM AND THE STYR

THE six horses seemed to take another leap through the air as they left the lower courtyard, and Ordham expected to land on the tree-tops below. But those horses, that had the motion of winged things, flew unerringly along the lower road, through the dark forest, down the mountain side to Füssen. In this loyal village every window, suddenly lighted, was flung open, heads of old and young appeared, and delighted cries of "*Heil unserem König, Heil!*" rang after the undetected occupants of the coach when they were once more in the forest. Up hill and down hill flew the horses, out of the forest again, toward snow peaks that seemed to be flying about in distraction, sometimes rushing to meet these mad riders of the night. The coachman and footman kept their seats as if a part of the bounding vehicle. But Ordham and his companion were so tossed about that he soon gathered up the cushions and packed them round her, then leaning his weight on those between them, braced his feet on the opposite seat. He made no attempt to hold her in place as another man might have done, he did not even touch her; and Margarethe Styr, who had been accustomed to men that took every possible advantage of a woman's helplessness, gave him a place in her regard that she never permanently revoked.

But nothing was farther from his mind than the wish to touch her. She was a woman alone with him under somewhat hazardous circumstances, and he protected her instinctively and made her as comfortable as possible. Although he would have risen to the occasion as a matter of course, he was grateful that he was not with a woman

who would expect to be made love to, but with this strange and delightful creature, who, exhilarated by the terrific speed and the danger, could enjoy herself in precisely his own fashion. He did not even ask her if she were frightened, although once, as they tore through a narrow gorge with the roar of waters far below, he leaned over the side of the carriage, holding the cushions firmly against her with his left hand, then, as he resumed his former position, remarked :

"Three hundred feet, I should think, and perhaps three inches between the wheels and the edge."

She laughed, and he turned his eyes quickly to her white face, in which the dark eyes were more widely opened and eager than usual.

"You enjoy the idea of possibly being dashed to pieces on those rocks — getting out of it all."

Her eyes met his in a cold flash. "Do you realize what you have said?"

"That you are the bravest woman I ever saw, but with no love of life. Could you be the greatest actress in the world otherwise?"

"I wonder if you really know what you are saying? But you are young — so very young."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Well — perhaps — what?"

"Nothing, really. I have seen you look very old and very young, and every shade between. When you get that helmet on your head in *Die Walküre*, you look sixteen, much too young for the part. Just now you look like a fate. A woman who calls out of their graves other women that have been dead for centuries and gives them life again for four or five hours, — Wagner's operas are much too long, — who makes them live so intensely that their very dust must feel the current, — why, of course, you have no age. Margarethe Styr disappears, ceases to exist. When she returns to her tenement, it must be with the sensation of being born again. For myself — well, perhaps I am forty masquerading as a boy."

"I know exactly how old you are," she said maliciously. "And you could not grow a mustache to save your life."

"Nothing would induce me to!" And then they both laughed, although he blushed very red, for he was sensitive on the subject of his age and wished that Peerages had never been invented.

Styr put her hands to her face and gave a faint scream. A column of fire had shot up in the path just ahead of the horses.

"The moon has gone under a cloud and the outrider has lit the torch," Ordham reassured her.

She dropped her hands and leaned forward eagerly. The moon had made the wild mountain scenery, the forests and snow peaks, the upper reaches, so beautiful that more than once she had held her breath, felt as if her soul were full of crystal flowers. The flaming torch, high in the right hand of the outrider, lit the vast scene in a fashion that suggested the approach to Hell arranged in honour of distinguished visitors. The waterfalls leaping down the opposite cliffs, the glittering peaks, the gloomy roaring depths of the gorges, started out red and black, disappeared, flashed in the distance, rushed forward to hurl themselves at the flying carriage. Ordham wondered how many horses the King killed in a year. But he was too much interested in the scene, the adventure, to care. It was more wonderful, more satisfying, than anything he had ever dreamed of. For a moment he had an ecstatic desire for death, if only to avoid the anticlimax of life.

The moon came out again. The torch was extinguished. All the Alpine world was white and silver. It seemed like a sudden ascent into the vast quiet regions of space from the chaos of the Inferno. Both Ordham and his companion, who had been sitting tensely, leaned back with a sensation of contentment and peace.

In a moment she turned to him with softly shining eyes and said, "Cannot you understand the King a little better?"

"I think so."

"Not yet! Be thankful for that."

"When you began to sing to-night, I was frightfully oppressed by the thought of that tormented soul only a few feet from me. Then I forgot him."

some mismanagement of the Unknown
the dark passages of a Wittelsbach br
If he only had been in a position to wor
of mortal salvation — to become a great
flamed and smothered by the megaloma
and of a king with no part to play on the
No wonder there are abysses in his br
life will build no bridges."

"Do you know him well?"

"I have never exchanged a word wit
him face to face."

"No?" Ordham turned to her with a q
He had attributed the Nachmeister's
amiable mood of the moment, but it did
to doubt the word of Margarethe Styr.
you so much favour — "

"He is grateful for my voice, poor sou
a few moments' happiness. But I shall
I wish I might. I understand him so we

"Then you too do not belong to this p

"I wonder you did not add that I too
oul."

"That is what I meant."

"But I have not." She looked at him

"Oh, you are clever! But, yes — in certain conditions. There are moments when I am happier than any one not an artist can ever dream of being. And betweenwhiles — with my studies, my long meditations upon the characters I portray — for I find always something new in those strange women, that not even The Master apprehended when he resurrected them — in my unruffled life, in my certainty of repeated triumphs — well, it is close enough to happiness; although I am willing to confess that it might not have been at your age. Have we really pulled up a bit?"

The horses were trotting quietly across a valley, where, unable to find excitement, the King, no doubt, was in the habit of sparing his unhappy beasts. But a few moments later the speed was increased again, apparently that they might enter a village on the other side of the valley like a hurricane. Here, as in all the other villages through which they had flashed, was the same rattling of windows flung up, the same flaring of lights, the same passionate cry: —

"*Heil unserem König, Heil!*"

But in this case the cheers stopped abruptly, for the faithful peasants had time to discover their mistake; the foaming horses came to a sudden halt before the gasthaus trembling and panting. As Ordham and Countess Tann descended into the narrow street which flamed like a comet, there were loud astonished cries. The outrider made a brief explanation, and the lights were extinguished, the windows slammed. In the beloved romantic figure of their King these humble folk took a deathless interest, but not the least in any guest he might invite to his castles; although for a week from this night they discussed the strange fact that he condescended to have guests at all, much less relinquish in their favour his midnight drive.

But the landlord of the inn had expected the King's visitors, and kept his counsel: a groom on horseback had galloped in with orders half an hour before. Ordham and Styr were conducted into a long dark raftered room which had been hastily aired of its evening fumes of beer and

tobacco, and illuminated with lamps and candles. There was a fire in the big tiled stove, and Ordham hastily threw off his overcoat and removed the long Arabian-looking wrap in which the singer was muffled. The supper was not ready, and he looked her over as she stood by the fire with her back to him, a tall figure draped in severe white folds, a finely poised head with loosened coils of heavy but rippling brown hair that shone as if polished daily with a silk handkerchief. But although she was engaged in the prosaic occupation of warming her hands, he received the impression that he always did in the first act of *Tristan* and the second of *Götterdämmerung*, of a ruthless mental force, barely held in leash, of sullen deadly fires.

It was like a sudden vision of Aspasia in the dark tobacco-scented room of the little Alpine gasthaus, but in a moment he forgot his fancies; she turned to him with bright eyes and flushed cheeks that made her look human and young.

"How odd! How odd!" she cried. "And the oddest part of it is that I like it — talking to a human being once more. It might even seem natural to feel young and gay again. And in spite of your preternatural insight — or whatever it is — you are deliciously young, and, I think, stimulated all that was still youthful in my brain the moment we made friends."

"Are we to remain friends?"

"I do not know. I must think it over."

"I shall call."

"Of course. That would be mere civility. But I am not sure that you will get in."

He was never demonstrative in manner, although he often indulged in certain exaggerations of speech. But he could direct a quiet smiling appeal from his juvenile orbs which he had discovered was seldom resisted. He was far too clever to flirt with Margarethe Styr, so upon this occasion he merely looked like a very young man begging indulgence of a goddess. She smiled and shook her head.

"I am not sure. It is the first step that counts, and first steps are too often fatal. I might find myself enjoy-

ing the society of my kind again. I want nothing less — the even tenor of my life destroyed. When one has attained a form of happiness it is the quintessence of folly to risk it."

"But the first step — you have taken it. We have had an adventurous night together and I shall refuse to be ignored."

"To-morrow it will seem like a dream."

"To-morrow, but not a week hence," he retorted with his uncommon sagacity, which fascinated her more than any trait he had yet displayed to her. "And nothing can alter the fact that it is no dream, and that neither of us can forget it. I shall call to-morrow."

She laughed and they sat down to the omelette that preceded the chickens. Like all singers she had a healthy appetite, and wondered that she had not missed her usual replenishment even after but an hour and a half of work.

"How do you manage it — concentrating all that tragedy in your eyes?" asked Ordham, abruptly. "Is it that you draw your brows together in some peculiar way — I fancy that is it; they are so low and straight. Will you show me?"

"Do you think I am a machine?" The artist arose in her wrath. "Do you fancy that when I am suffering the anguish of Iseult or Brynhildr I put eyebrows on my soul?"

"But you don't really feel it? I thought artists dared not feel too much. I have seen would-be emotional actresses carried away to such an extent that they were quite ridiculous."

"You give no stage artist the credit of a brain, I suppose? Can you imagine a born actress — born, mind you — living her part, yet never quite shaking loose from that strong grip above? That is what is meant by 'living a part.' You abandon yourself deliberately — with the whole day's preparation — into that other personality, almost to a soul in possession, and are not your own self for one instant; although the purely mental part of that self never relaxes its vigilance over the usurper. It is a

curious dual experience that none but an artist can understand. Of course that perfect duality is only possible after years of study, work, practical experience, mastery of technique. No beginner, no matter what her genius, should dare to abandon herself to her rôles."

"You must have had great masters. You have harrowed me horribly."

"I have had none, except Wagner. Five years of stage experience in the United States were of a certain value, for although I never had an important part — I was too tall, I was not interested, my talent barely stirred — still I observed, I studied in an abstract mental fashion, I gained poise. It is an achievement alone to feel at home on the stage."

He was burning with impatience. "How in heaven's name could they have failed over there to discover that you were a great actress, whether or not you chose to cultivate your genius — and why not? why not? I hope you do not think me merely curious. I am trying to speak as one of the public that adores you — quite impersonally. There are so few great actresses. I feel that you had no right, for any private reasons whatever, to build a bushel over your talent. No genius belongs to himself alone."

The colour left her face, but she replied composedly: "Perhaps not, but that is not the way that women, at least, reason when they are young. I went on the stage, not because I was stage-struck, nor in poverty, but for a reason that I cannot give you. When I found that the big heavy voice that even singing teachers had laughed at could be minted into pure gold for the new music, — which only one of the many instructors I sought knew anything about, or at least believed in, — then I felt resigned even to the causes which had driven me to the stage. I have become inordinately ambitious; I often wonder what life can mean to those that have no excuse for ambition — it is one of the reasons which enabled me to begin life all over again. I was indeed another being after my first triumph at Bayreuth, and not only because half the crowned heads in Europe rushed to hear me the second time I sang; when

stood on the greatest stage in the world with all my being set to the music soaring from my throat, not a nerve out of tune, I knew that I no longer was of common clay, that nothing that had ever happened to me before mattered in the least. Ah, what matter the charnel rooms in the soul when such memories blaze forever above? Poor women! Poor women! — that have no such blinding moments — that must sit and think — and think — "

Her eyes, dilated, horror-struck, gazed beyond Ordham, who felt intolerably excited. He drew a short breath of relief when she recovered herself abruptly, and said with a laugh: "But the world is very ungrateful to its stage artists. Think of Mallinger, Josephine Schefzky, Malwina Schnoor von Caroldsfeld. Less than twenty years ago all Germany rang with their fame. Have you ever heard their names?"

"I have heard of Schefzky! It was she that overturned the swan boat in the winter garden of the Residenz when sailing with the King — dressed up as Lohengrin! — and he ran off, dripping, and calling to a lackey to pull her out. I love that story."

"It is all that keeps poor Josephine's name alive. However — what matter so long as we have our little day? Only the chosen few have that. What have you made up your mind to do with your own life?"

She put the question so abruptly that he almost dropped his fork. "If I have interested you sufficiently to inspire that question, then the last six or eight years have not atrophied everything but the artist. Unless you asked it for the sake of saying something," he added anxiously.

"Not altogether. I suddenly wondered. Excellenz Nachmeister and the few people I meet often mention you. I have had the impression that you were badly spoilt, but your head does not seem to be turned."

"Why should it be? No one has ever spoilt me — thought of such a thing" (and he really meant it). "I am going into the diplomatic service, if you care to know. I am here to get my German — not that I get much, between rushing about and four teachers that practise their English on me."

ed his youngest, and was eating his al
daintily as a girl, she moved toward him
protection. He still had the soft bloon
and eye that the most innocent of wom
nd she knew the world he lived in. Wha
o, that he too must change! Between
pressions and exceeding opportunities, h
world, and his brain might be all that a
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uritanical, generally the former, circum
ited her experience. She had met

country always consciously making history, added to his own uncommon individuality, fascinated her. She would have liked to cultivate him, but she relinquished that idea, and said practically:

"These are precious years if you really mean to make a career. I know an excellent teacher, and will send her to you to-morrow. But you must not waste her time. Will you promise me to study?"

"Of course." Ordham was always willing to promise anything. "I'll dismiss all four and take her for as many hours as she will give me. You inspire me with a desire to work. Did you begin to study German when you were very young that your accent is so perfect?"

"I did not study anything when I was very young." She hesitated, reflected that in all probability she would never see this young man again, and might as well drop a good seed when the opportunity was given her; it did not occur often. "I did not know even the English alphabet until I was fifteen. Nor did any other child in the wretched coal-mining district where I first saw light. It was peopled wholly by the poorest class of immigrants from eastern Europe — brought over wholesale by enterprising and not too honest mine owners. My clothes were made of hop-sacking. I had not the faintest idea that I was good-looking, for the simple reason that I was never clean or half fed. My mind was as tightly closed as an oyster. I recall no desires beyond want of more food and the night that brought rest. My mother died at my birth, and I was taken in by a family of fellow-immigrants to whom one more child meant one more future bread-winner.

"Suddenly, I went to New York. Almost immediately I began to attend a public school — a free school, not a public school in your sense. Later I had tutors, masters. I learned well from the first. My intellect, that is to say my interest in books, awakened early — novels, at first, of course; gradually heavier works. In them I soon learned to forget; that is to say, I found in them a separate and particular happiness. I made a special study of the

language and the literature of Germany. Whence I inherit my tendencies and talents I have no idea. From nowhere, most likely. Some mysterious disarrangement of particles, of which science, so far, knows nothing. You are an exotic yourself, or I am much mistaken. To return — that rushing of the awakened mind over dam after dam, barrier after barrier, — there is nothing under heaven like it, except the discovery that one was born to be a great artist, which, of course, is the supreme happiness. There were times, even then, when I was as happy as I ever shall be; that is to say, my mental exaltation was as great, for I suppose that is what mortal happiness really means, what gives us our most precise distinction from the lower order of animals, and makes us feel our relationship to that omnipotent force which we personify as God. At all events it was a life apart, a secret life, a life in which no one — no one — " her voice rose on an accent almost furious — "could enter. And of course those years of study played their part in making me what I am to-day. Most singers have no brain, no mental life; they must be taught their rôles like parrots, they put on a simulation of art with their costumes which deceives the great stupid public and touches no one. Mere emotionalism, animal robustness, they call temperament. I strengthened and developed my brain during those terrible years to such an extent that I now act out of it, think myself into every part, relying not at all upon the instructions of the uninspired, nor upon chance."

Ordham had forgotten his dessert and was staring at her, fascinated, almost bewildered. Again she had lifted a corner of the veil. If she would but fling it aside! And pity overwhelmed him, for he saw far behind her words. But his face betrayed little of his emotions, and when she paused abruptly, he said: "You have an object in telling me this. What is it?"

"To show what obstacles can be overcome by the power of the will and by ceaseless mental activity rightly directed. You have no obstacle to overcome but your indolence, which may, nevertheless, balk your languid desire for a career.

Therefore, if you fail; if ten years hence you are a mere society butterfly, a drone, which, I infer, Munich is doing its best to make of you; if twenty years hence you are an old beau, with no object but to be invited out every night that you may escape death by ennui, — you need curse no one but yourself. Had I failed, I should have been justified in throwing myself into the river, cursing life, fate, your entire sex. I have conquered in spite of every millstone that could be hung about a woman's neck. But you!"

He had flushed, and looked frightened. The vision she had evoked was not pleasant. He answered steadily, however: "Thank you for telling me all this. I know that no one, not even Princess Nachmeister, has ever heard one-tenth as much from you. What shall I do to show my gratitude?"

"Make a great man of yourself and study with Fräulein Lutz," she said gayly, as they rose from the table. "I think they are bringing those poor horses round."

They started by the light of the torch, but on the return journey the horses were spared, save on the more dangerous parts of the road. Then they galloped as if bent on destruction. While the carriage rocked and bounded through a gorge with the thunder of waters below and the narrow pass reeling in the red flame, Ordham regaled his companion with the story of the wild black night when the outrider, overcome by panic, had flung the torch into the depths, and fled shrieking, leaving the King to his fate. But she only laughed and shrugged her shoulders, and would not talk until they entered the valley of the Pöllat. The moon had sailed high above the thick Bavarian clouds, and the great white pile of Neuschwanstein seemed to be poised in the black void. Margarethe pointed to a solitary figure standing on the balcony before the throne room.

"The King," she said softly. "He has his consolations. Who can say he is not happier in his mystic communion with nature, in his freedom to dwell amidst such scenes as this, than the mere mortals that pity him and think him

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mad? He is looking out now on the three snow peaks. Who knows? He may be their offspring. Mountains are no mere masses of rock, and he is no mere mortal. When his adumbrated spirit sheds that gross mass of flesh, who can say what glorious destiny awaits it? I should like to meet him out there in space. I feel sure he will reign over a noble kingdom, where he will no longer be alone, but where only the rarest spirits may enter."

"Are you in love with Ludwig — with his soul?"

"Not even that. But I should be glad to know that he, above all men, — for he has suffered most, — had found what we all seek and never find — I mean all of us who are worthy of loneliness."

"You do not believe in mortal companionship, then?"

"No."

"I wonder."

As he handed her out of the carriage in the courtyard they were surrounded by lackeys, and her anxious maid awaited her. But he said, as they shook hands:

"Thank you so much — again and again. And I shall call to-morrow."

VI

CERTAIN INEVITABLE PHASES

SOMEWHAT to his surprise, but vastly to his gratification, Ordham, on the following afternoon, was handed a card inscribed "Hiobe Lutz," accompanied by a line of introduction on one of Gräfin von Tann's. He had just risen from luncheon in the Legation, and received the rather formidable looking female in the anteroom. She addressed him in such German as he had seldom heard in Bavaria, announced that she should never utter a word of English during his lessons, that he must dismiss his other teachers and study with her every morning, Sundays excepted, from ten until twelve. The last was a harrowing prospect, for he hated early rising; but he had the wit to perceive that here was the force to control his indolence and furnish his brain, that he would never fascinate this grenadier with his wiles and be permitted to entertain her in English. Moreover, he realized that she had received instructions from Margarethe Styr, and this flattered him deeply. The arrangement was quickly made and Fräulein Lutz departed, announcing that upon his second failure to appear promptly at ten o'clock she should consider herself dismissed. She would not waste her time, — she was assisting a historian upon a great work, — no, not for anybody.

Several hours later Ordham left a card on Countess Tann, and with it a note of thanks. But he did not ask for admittance. It cost him an unaccustomed effort of self-denial to turn from her door when there was a bare possibility of crossing its threshold, but he had reflected that he had no right to take advantage of his chance intimacy with a recluse, nor even of her very marked kindness; moreover,

that, having done his duty, it was her privilege to ask him to come another day and drink a cup of tea.

But the days passed and it waxed evident that she had no intention of embracing her opportunity. In ordinary conditions he might have been piqued, for he was more spoilt than he knew; certainly disappointed. But even he had his worries, and two descended upon him the day after his return from Neuschwanstein.

One arrived in the morning mail. It was a request from his tailor to pay a bill of four years' standing, a letter whose inexorable business flavour — which seemed to him sheer insolence — left him aghast. It is true that he had received several reminders from this necessary but ignominious person during the past six months, and tossed them, half read, into his waste-basket. It annoyed him to receive a bill at all, but that the demands of a mere machine might increase in firmness, much less hint of "summons," had never crossed his mind. Until his father's death four years since, he had rarely read a bill, or even, extravagant as he was, suffered remonstrance from a parent, who, regretting that his favourite son should not have been his first, made a point of ignoring the fact when he could. Every acre of the large estate was entailed, Lord Bridgminster's personal property was small, and there were five sons more to educate and provide for. The oldest son and his father had not met for years, but while there was antipathy, there was no rancour; and Lord Bridgminster, never being called upon to meet debts for a man who lived the year round in his hunting box, contrived to forget him. Disappointed in his second wife, after the glamour of her peculiar personality had vanished, he devoted himself to politics and the son whom he fain would believe must inherit the solid honours as well as the brains of his house. Whenever the boy came home from Eton, and later, from Oxford, — where it rarely occurred to him to open a book, — he was received at Ordham Castle with all the honours and attentions due to the heir, and, had his father lived a year longer, the celebration of his twenty-first birthday would have dimmed the memory of the perfunctory festivities with

which the majority of Lord Ordham had been announced to the county. And as it grew to be an accepted fact that the Timon would never marry, the oldest of the second family was so generally recognized as the heir, that, from the servants up, he was visited with no reminders of the long interval which might elapse before he could spend the income that went with the titles. Even after his father's death it was some time before he began to appreciate the difference in his fortunes, for he spent the following summer yachting with a friend, and, a few months later, left Christ Church abruptly and went for a tour round the world. He finished in Paris, where, through the influence of his mother, a place had been found for him, unofficially, in the British Embassy. Moreover, Lord Bridgminster had managed to leave him two thousand pounds, and, although this ran away quickly, it served to postpone the day when he must reckon with a younger son's portion.

And he had been brought up in that criminal ignorance of the value of money which has compassed the ruin of so many of the younger members of the British aristocracy. American fathers may live up to the last dollar of the large income they make by the constant turning over of their discrepant capital, die bankrupt, or leave nothing but a life insurance to their women; but the sons, no matter how indulged, grow up in the electric atmosphere of a business country; the subject of money and its infinite meanings is never long absent from the conversation about them nor from their minds; they witness the rise and fall of fortunes, the fluctuation of incomes, the accidents to which the most cautious are liable; and they live through those periodical rabies of the money market known as panics, which focus the attention of the most careless. Leisure they know to be merely an incident; they realize that, however wise it may be to enjoy life while conditions are favourable, it is equally wise to keep one's energies polished and alert. And these energies are born in the blood, which perhaps is the whole point.

There is, save for war and sport, little latent energy in the blood of the young British aristocrat whose ancestors

have too long been men of leisure. He has no acquaintance with business, and as little premonition of the serious responsibilities of life as of its ugly contacts. Surrounded, sheltered, reared in an atmosphere of plenty, with expensive habits, and self-denial no part of his creed (and the sons of peers comparatively poor are no exceptions), he has during his father's lifetime all the advantages and refinements of the concentrated income of the estates that go to the head of the house. Then comes the inevitable moment when he is turned adrift, and confronted with the problem of maintaining his legitimate position in the world upon a younger son's pittance. Readjustment taking place in few characters except at the conclusion of a series of shocks, and as often not then, he goes on spending mechanically, expecting that a new deus ex machinâ will as inevitably appear as the regular if sometimes invisible stars.

Ordham had imbibed the half-admitted principle that those that toiled existed merely by virtue of their usefulness to the great. It might be necessary to throw a bone occasionally to prevent snarling, or even for mere humanity's sake; but that these underlings should presume to demand a settlement of accounts at inconvenient seasons — the liberty would hardly be greater did they solicit an invitation to dinner! That it was dishonest to buy when you had no definite prospect of paying, Ordham would have regarded as a principle of foreign growth, possibly American, wholly plebeian. It was not a matter upon which he had ever wasted a moment's analysis; but possibly, had it been put to him with uncompromising bluntness, he would have been startled and ashamed, for he was not only kind and lavish, but without conscious arrogance; as for the word "dishonesty" it never entered his conversation or head unless some man of his class committed incomprehensible follies and went to Wormwood Scrubbs.

But if he had not as yet given the question sufficient thought even to defend himself on the ground that the tradespeople were more culpable than the fatuous class whose reckless habits they encouraged that they might

suck their life blood undetected, he had long since begun to resent his paltry income, and to wonder in what torpors Providence drowsed when she permitted his useless miserly brother to come into the world before himself. Still, he had felt the actual pinch very seldom, for Bridgminster, under strong pressure, had twice paid his debts since the death of his father, and his temperament and tastes saved him from certain of the snares that are spread for young and engaging patricians.

But if too fastidious and too indifferent for dissipation, his sensuous artistic pleasure-loving nature, his extravagant personal habits, — he was one of the best-dressed young men in Europe, — and his careless generosity, demanded the income of an heir-apparent, and his brother incredibly failed to settle it upon him. Of the word "economy" he had not the vaguest appreciation. He would no more have bought a cheap edition of a favourite book than he would have worn ready-made clothing; clear type, hand-made paper, and a chaste binding were as necessary to his enjoyment as the contents they adorned, and he had already collected a considerable library in three languages. In Paris he had kept house with two brother secretaries, and, personally, a brougham and a riding horse. He by no means despised cards and the turf. He had attended the opera and theatre every night in the week, if only for an act, and he had made a notable little collection of etchings, prints, and bibelôts. Moreover, the three young men had done the Embassy credit by the elegance and originality of their entertainments. When Lord Bridgminster paid the last of the bills whose gracefully dissipated substance had added lustre to his name, he announced in no mistakable terms that his brother would hereafter live within his income or go to the devil. It is possible that the reverberations of his wrath reached London, for it was shortly after Ordham arrived in Munich that his tradespeople, whose existence he had forgotten, began to send in their accounts. Ordham, of course, had not taken his brother's proclamation seriously; nevertheless, he knew that he would have more trouble extracting money in the

future. He relied upon the blandishments of his mo
the only member of the family tolerated by its pre
head.

Lady Bridgminster, still a woman of considerable fash
was always hard up, always in debt. She had bee
beauty of the early Rossetti type in her young womanh
that great painter, indeed, had immortalized her on can
and since her husband's death what she had saved in f
avoiding increase, she had spent on rare and lovely fab
stones, and distracted dressmakers, that she might re
her individual style and with it the illusion of youth.
gave her oldest son much advice, but never a penny.
advice by no means was to reform his habits, but to
him a rich wife. She was quite sensible of his attract
and thought he should have established himself be
this. "Bridg is thirty-eight," she had written him ju
he was leaving Paris. "As likely as not he will sudd
cease to be a misogynist at forty, come up to London,
make a fool of himself; he would be putty in the h
of the first clever mother of portionless daughters
marked him as her own. Then where would be t
golden apples you have grown accustomed to regar
your own (in pickle)? I have always believed them t
just a shelf too high, and that is the reason I have
so firm about the diplomatic career; not only becau
suits your talents, but because it will be the mean
dazzling some wealthy American girl, to whom the p
pect of a position in the diplomatic circles of Europe
prove quite as alluring as a coronet — which, for that ma
you may win for yourself. I prefer an American, bec
her relatives will not be likely to live in England.
alliance with any of the modern British tribes might p
extremely awkward; and who else over here has
money — I mean for poor dowagers and younger s
The Americans, when well-bred, have such a charmin
dependence, yet know exactly how far to go. And
they are generous and would pay my bills. Tradespe
are so tiresome. Don't ask me, dear Johnny, for mo
As well ask courage of a mouse. If I were young eno

or did not have six boys inadequately provided for, I might marry again. As it is, my only present hope is in you. Too bad the other boys are not girls. I should defy any man in England to escape me if I marked him for my prey with a pink and white complexion on the hook.

"I don't know what your opportunities will be in Munich, but at least you will be able to live within your income for a bit; you could not spend money in a dowdy old German town if you tried — at least no one else could, but I rather fancy you could spend money in the canals of Mars. If Munich has no magnet for the American heiress, try to pass your examinations this year, that you may be launched the sooner." Then followed several pages of news about his brothers, one of whom was at Sandhurst, one at Eton, the others with a tutor in the country, all "growing at a frightful rate," and costing every penny their father had been able to set aside for their education. In a postscript she reverted to the first theme. "Remember that you *must, must* marry money. You are the grand seigneur. You will never learn economy. And why should you?"

Ordham recalled this letter as he stared at the epistle of his tailor. He longed to send the man a check accompanied by a curt withdrawal of his patronage. This being out of the question, and Bridgminster untractable for the present, his diplomacy conquered his indignation and he wrote a polite note, promising to call and settle his account "immediately upon his arrival in London." Then, concluding upon further reflection that the man was indulging in what the Americans called bluff, he dismissed the matter into one of the water-tight compartments of his mind, where it rubbed elbows in the dark with other episodes best forgotten.

But the second evil was more pressing. For two weeks past, having exhausted even his fertile ingenuity in excuses for not calling upon a certain Frau von Wass, he had burned her letters unopened. She was a Bulgarian, married these twenty years to a Bavarian Privy Councillor

(Geheimrath), barely tolerated in Munich society, which has little hospitality for foreigners, and indulging her amorous propensities at the constant risk of her position; the Müncheners, lenient to their own, or to the outsider they embrace voluntarily, circle like lynxes in the pathway of the intruder. Hélène Wass was both stupid and clever; the well-trained instincts of the born adventuress taught her how to entertain as well as to fascinate men; but she bored her own sex with her egotism, her imaginary complaints, her tirades against her husband, servants, enemies, and antagonized them by the bewildering variety and grandeur of her Paris costumes, her ostentation, and her conquests. Of plebeian origin, but, with the external traits of heredity corrected by a ten years' sojourn in a convent in Vienna, determined to have admiration, excitement, and money at any cost, her father having lost his little fortune in speculation, it is possible that she would have drifted into the half-world had not an anxious relative persuaded her to marry the wealthy and respectable Herr Geheimrath von Wass, although he was thirty years her senior and already fat. She met him while visiting a school friend in Hungary, where he owned an estate.

The commonplace deceit of the girl quickly developed into the subtlety of the woman, and she found no difficulty in managing a husband whose ruling passion was vanity. She found Munich as dull, narrow, and provincial as only an exclusive court society can be; but she consoled herself with the assurance that she extracted more out of it than any woman who courtesied to the King by divine right. She had loved much, but had never been tempted to leave her dull important old husband, and had long since forgotten the dreams of her convent days, when she had alternately yearned for the honourable proposals of an archduke and the untrammelled life of a cocotte. In all the eminent women of the half-world there is something of the grande dame, and doubtless, had fate, at the critical moment, dealt them a rich and powerful husband, they would have become equally distinguished members of society. So it was, at least, with Hélène Wass. Although Munich

never ceased to harp upon the suggestion of the demimondaine in her dress, her beauty, her very essence, — whatever they may have meant by that, — she was now a very great little lady, and no inferior ever made a mistake in approaching her.

She was thirty-nine, and, without artifice, looked quite ten years younger. Her light blue eyes, sometimes insolently bright, often soft and languid, so thickly lashed that they looked made up; her abundant hair, of a rich hot brown, arranged with apparent carelessness about her pale eager often excited, little face; her slender, tiny, stately, and always smartly attired figure — composed a magnet for the eyes of men wherever she appeared. She had fascinated Ordham, always on the lookout for the uncommon, not only by her odd beauty, her sprightliness, her wild morbid moods, but by her subtle appeal to his sympathies. Far too clever to practise upon men's senses alone, she had quickly discovered that the young Englishman was chivalrous, possibly sentimental, and, in the outer wrappings of his heart, indubiously soft. Unlike Mrs. Cutting, she did not divine the hardness at the core, that hardness which is the inevitable result of waiting for dead men's shoes, of resentment against fate for putting the shoes on the wrong feet, of belonging to a class which secretly believes itself to be above all laws.

But she quickened his sympathies so effectually that he had suddenly found her in his arms, gasping out her hatred of life, her frantic desire to die at once. He had been stirred, flattered, delighted; but all these emotions lasted little over a fortnight. He soon chafed at the halter round his neck, and endeavoured to escape from it without wounding the susceptibilities of a lady to whom he was still young enough to be grateful. To escape, however, he was determined; not only did he shrink from her tropical storms, but — and for once her astuteness had failed her — he had no mind to be at any woman's beck and call. She had sent him summonses at all hours of the day and night, and forced him to break more than one engagement he would have preferred to keep. Courteous diplomacy failing, he

had been driven to ignore her existence. Her present command, however, he could not afford to disregard, for it arrived in a telegram, and announced that if he did not call upon her at three o'clock she would call upon him at the Legation at four.

He had a bad two hours with Fräulein Lutz, and was so dull and absent at luncheon that although there were guests he had no difficulty in making his escape. But he lingered in his own room, cursing his folly, for half an hour longer; then, offering a cab driver double fare to hasten, managed to arrive at the "palace" of the eminent Geheimrath at a quarter to four.

Frau Hélène, familiar with his habits, had not expected him earlier, and had preserved the equanimity necessary to the rôle she was determined to play. Instead of being conducted to the Pompadour boudoir, where he expected to find her in negligée and tears, he was ushered into the great Empire drawing-room, where she stood severely attired in a black velvet gown, whose train gave her fictitious inches and accented the proud mask into which she had set her mobile little face. She saw at a glance that he was very white and nervous, but more dignified, more remote, than ever, and only long experience, and the cool brain of the born huntress, enabled her to restrain her passion. She completely disconcerted him by putting out her hand and smiling brightly.

"That was a wild telegram," she said, in her soft, somewhat thick voice. "But — let us sit quite in the middle of the room where we cannot be overheard — I felt that I must see you before I go away."

"You are going away?" Ordham felt like a prisoner reprieved, but employed the tone of polite regret.

"My husband is so ill (this, of course, is a profound secret) that I have persuaded him to go to his estate in Hungary and die in peace. Not that he has the least idea he must die, poor old dear; we call it resting for a time. As you may fancy, dear Mr. Ordham, I have few regrets in leaving a city whose insults and slights I have been forced to endure for fifteen years — I was married on my

sixteenth birthday" (Ordham had looked her up also in the *Graf Buch*), "and now — well —"

He drew a long breath and clenched his hands. She continued:

"I felt that I *must* see you before I left. I telegraphed because I felt sure that you had ceased to open my notes —"

"Oh! How can you say such a thing?"

"You were quite right. I have done the same thing myself. But many, many times! When a woman of my age makes a fool of herself, she does not deserve half the consideration which you have shown to me. Seven years may be very few as time goes, but they are an eternity when a woman commits the folly of loving a man younger than herself —"

"Oh! How can you say such things? How can you —" Ordham, who had been prepared for worse, felt as if his brain were being flicked with red-hot whips. He sprang to his feet and strode up and down the room, longing to tear his hair, to bolt from the house. Frau von Wass continued:

"Allow me to see myself as I should see another woman in the same circumstances. And while it has not been a happy experience, it has been salutary. Of course, I knew, when you turned as sulky as Adonis and as polite as an unfaithful husband, that it was all over. But — being a woman —"

"I am so sorry!"

"You say that in precisely the same tone when you forget an appointment or are late for dinner." She spoke with soft humour. "But I did not send for you to reproach you, but for two reasons: to express my regret that I was so short-sighted as to sacrifice friendship to love, and to ask you to renew the first delightful relationship during the short time I shall remain in Munich."

"Why not?" he asked eagerly, in his immense relief. He had found her wholly charming during their earlier acquaintance; and was quite willing to obliterate the entr'acte, were only she. He took a straight chair op-

posite her, and did not even look at the little white hands lying so helplessly on the black velvet lap. He shrank from her, and she guessed this, and for the moment was filled with such a rage of hatred that she would have stuck a knife into him had one been at hand. As it was she dropped her eyelashes, and permitted her red lips to quiver. Then she looked him full in the face and said quietly:

"It is too kind of you to believe that you can stand me for a fortnight longer. You are safe. You gave me a blow on the heart that has paralyzed it—no! do not get up again. I am not reproaching you, merely stating the case, quite dispassionately, as you can see. Love is a sealed book to me from this time forth, and, far from feeling reproachful,—ah! dear Mr. Ordham,—I am grateful. Just so often as a woman loves does she die. She comes to life again in the course of time, but with less and less of energy, illusion, her original power to love and be happy. I sometimes think that love is a congestion of a spot in the brain round the image of the man, which stares at her waking and sleeping, never to be banished from the tortured consciousness till Time has drained the blood from that little spot. And then it withers! And the best man on earth could never give life to that dead spot again. I am telling all this to your curious analytical mind, knowing of old how such things interest you, and being quite beyond all sensation myself. Now," she concluded, rising like royalty and holding out her hand, which he took limply, "I shall let you go — how cold your hand is!"

"I am congealed! You have made me utterly miserable."

"Not utterly, but a little. You deserve that much. Poor boy!" Her accent was that of the indulgent woman of the world. "Your education has begun too early. Nature did you an ill turn in giving you a brain and a charm out of all proportion to your years. You ought to be amusing yourself with nice English girls" (she knew that he hated English girls), "not playing up to a lot of European flirts a dozen years older than yourself. Be thankful that you fell into my hands. You are now as free as air

once more — only — you will come here often this last fortnight?"

"Of course." He shook hands with her once more and escaped from the house. As he opened the gate, absorbed in his miserable reflections, and quite unaware of his white dejected face, he did not notice a carriage that passed, nor that the occupant leaned forward suddenly; but a moment later he vaguely recognized the brougham and liveries of Countess Tann.

Within the magnificent Empire salon, which had tempted more than one member of the royal family, upon whom restrictions as to quarterings did not sit as heavily as upon the anointed, Hélène Wass sat with clenched hands and contorted face. She had fought down her passion at the risk of a fainting fit, but, well as she thought she knew herself, she had not guessed how difficult it would be, hardly what proportions her passion had assumed. She had not had the faintest intention of leaving Munich; her object had been to disarm her episodical lover, as cold and restive as a young girl, and with other methods and other arts win him again. Failing that, she would indulge in the doubtful joy of his mere friendship. But now she discarded not only the last alternative, but the waiting policy.

One of Ordham's charms for this blasée woman of plebeian origin was the atmosphere of intellectual remoteness in which he seemed to dwell, and which, combined with his dignity and fine manners, made him the most finished type of the traditional aristocrat she had ever met. It was when she realized that she might never penetrate those outer envelopes of gayety and candour with which he concealed the intense reserve of his nature, that she had fallen genuinely in love with him; and the love of a woman of that sort is far more dangerous than her mere passion.

To-day, as he had sat in his straight chair, with his hands resting lightly, yet with a suggestion of weight, on his lap, completely at his ease in spite of his distress, his watchful brain throwing an almost visible shadow over his youth, she had become violently conscious that to possess this man wholly she would see the earth crumble under her

feet. It was the first time in her life that she had considered sacrificing the world for any man. Whether she loved Ordham more than she had ever loved before, she could not be sure, for when a woman has loved many times memory is the last thing she cultivates; but love, heretofore, had not demanded sacrifice as a part of its programme. Nor had she ever felt quite so sick of Munich, its passive impregnability, the eternal weary round of official dinners she was forced, as the wife of a Geheimrath, to give and attend; the husband, whom she had expected, when she married him, to leave her a young widow, had never seemed so hopelessly hale, the future had never looked so short.

She tore and gnawed her handkerchief until her gown was strewn with lint, but her brain worked clearly. Only a brief while of self-control and she felt positive that she could reawaken his interest. Then she would force him to compromise her in such a manner that he could not desert her when she fled from Munich. Six months at her villa in Italy, and then a quiet wedding; and in addition to owning the unfortunate youth, body and soul, she should enjoy a fair prospect of blinding the world to her indiscretion with the coronet of Bridgminster. So far, she had had no occasion to appeal to the young Englishman's honour or chivalry, but let her be able to demonstrate to him that, through the mighty passion he had awakened, her life was in ruins, and he would marry her beyond the shadow of a doubt. The opposition of his family would merely crystallize that obstinacy that showed its grim face now and again amidst the vacillations of a character still immature. To the young man's ruined career and maimed life, to his possibly broken heart, she gave not a thought; or had she, it would have made no difference in her plans. There is no adventuress so utterly unscrupulous as the society cocotte, with her demands so much more complicated than those of the women of commerce, particularly when her sated senses are electrified for the last time. Hélène Wass knew that she should never love again, and for love and the pleasure of spend-

ing money she had lived since the convent doors had closed behind her. Money of her own she now had in abundance, for her father had speculated rationally during the later years of his life and had left her, his sole heir, a considerable fortune. Once her lips gave a satirical twist as the question obtruded itself: should she have had the courage to sacrifice all for love on a younger son's meagre income? Then she felt something like a pang of gratitude that there was no obstacle to her headlong abandonment to a passion, which, whatever suffering and mortification it entailed, gave her back her youth, awoke once more in her weary brain the power to dream, to vizualize a future. Years before, it seemed to her, as she sat there and heard the heavy feet of her old husband in the hall, she had resigned herself to the interminable blankness of the present.

VII

THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

ORDHAM was unstrung and miserable for quite t
hours. He went that night to a rout at one of th
bassies, and, dully alive to the paltriness of life in ge
and the absurdities of small courts in particular, he p
past a group of astonished royalties with as little
mony as had they been hucksters and the occasion
Mayor's Day in London. He managed to avoid spe
to every one he knew; but at the end of an hour, rea
that he could no longer ignore Princess Nachmeist
Frau von Wass, he left the house. In no mood fo
student cafés, with their careless gayety, their atmos
so dense with smoke that the clusters of caps on the "t
were mere blurs of colour, he strolled into Maximi
restaurant fashionable during the day and early ev
on account of its exceptional cooking, but rather mo
teresting toward midnight and after. There was little
life in Munich, outside of the student haunts, but
milia was a favourite resort with the young bloods tha
seen enough of other capitals to scorn the bourgeois
of the true Münchener. Occasionally there was a da
stranger to ogle, but few ladies of the lower ten thou
found Munich worthy of their enterprise. The p
waitresses, actresses, chorus girls, then, as now, had
her patron, for even the young Bavarian officer is
domestic turn; and the floating tribe received such cu
attention that they had been known to cut short their
with anathema. But the officers often brought their g
young friends to Maximilia after twelve, and it am
Ordham, interested in every phase of life, to sit and w

this honest German attempt to feel as sophisticated as the Parisian.

And only in Munich, perhaps, a city too artistic to have a moral left, would army officers and their almost respectable partners rub elbows, in the best restaurant in the town, with painted young men come on the same quest as the floating female. There were three of these young men here to-night, all members of noble families, who had neither the energy nor the ambition in their worn-out blood to cross the ocean and seek to replenish their equally exhausted coffers in the manly avocations of waiter and riding master. Ordham usually watched them with a mild contempt, for they were of his class and he felt sorry for them. But to-night, as he saw the head of one of the oldest and most distinguished houses in Europe, a young man with something of Apollo in his slender grace, and a face of perfect beauty, despite its signal-flag of paint, enter, seat himself, and cast about the room a slow, anxious, appraising glance, Ordham, depressed as he already was, felt the very walls of his soul shudder. How much better fitted was he to cope with the grim problem of mere existence than these unfortunates? He had a fine physique, but his indolent habits, long indulged, had made nearly every form of exertion distasteful to him. Individual as he was, he yet belonged to that strictly modern type of English aristocrat impatiently dubbed "literary" by those that shoot and ride and eat and drink in the good old fashion of their ancestors. These intellectual young scions, without any peculiar talent or the obligations of poverty, too modest or too indolent to dream of enriching the arts they love, give themselves up more and more to the refined pleasures and sensibilities of the intellect, less and less to the pursuits that keep the blood swift and red in the veins. With many this attitude begins in affectation, even though as often it develops into something like a vocation; but in the case of Ordham the subtler chords of Life's big orchestra, forever inaudible to the swarm, had allured him since he could remember. If there was one reason more than another why Lord Bridgminster disliked and disapproved of

his heir presumptive, it was because of Ordham's candid aversion from "long tiresome meaningless days behind a gun," "tearing across country at the tail of a frantic fox," "wolfing food that would have stupefied the brain of a day labourer." But if the life he led was set to the tune of his temperament, he was forced to admit that he paid toll in the depletion of his physical vigours, for at this age, at all events, he should have been developing his muscles and enriching his blood in the open air.

To-night he felt more tired than usual, and as he stared blankly at the young nobleman to whom the centuries had given beauty and breeding in their highest perfection, and a sufficient amount of brain to make him something of a social star in every capital he visited, Ordham was driven to review his own resources. His income was inadequate for his mere needs, much less for his tastes, and some unthinkable reverse of fortune might deprive him of it altogether. Upon what, then, could he rely, not only to supply his material wants, but those others, which, never having been hungry, he believed to be far more indispensable were life to be tolerated at all. He was a lover of all the arts and a pupil of none. His reading was wide, he was fastidious in his manner of expressing himself; but what his fellow-students had learned out of books or in lecture rooms he had but the vaguest idea. The mere thought of roughing it in any of the colonies was as repugnant as of marrying a rich woman devoid of charm. "The City," into which he knew that many of his kind disappeared, he visualized as a maelstrom of high hats and office stools without backs. He had an aristocratic distaste for business, not out of snobbery, of which he was innocent, but because of a belief, both hazy and firm, that it commanded the development of the meaner faculties that only the cynically dishonest emerged from the gorged arena with fortune in their disfigured hands. To-night, however, he recalled, what he had practically forgotten that the moneyed foundations of the house of Ordham had been laid anew but four generations since by the desperate heir of the ancient but impoverished family: he had built

a textile factory on one end of his Yorkshire property. This enterprise prospering, he had built another, and another, until he was enabled to buy back twenty thousand of the acres confiscated during the Civil Wars, restore Ordham Castle, unroofed and sacked by Cromwell, and furnish it with all the horrors in horsehair, rep, mahogany, and meaningless bronze which preceded the crusade of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He then found leisure to occupy his seat in the House of Lords, developed other useful talents, and was raised from the barony of Ordham to the earldom of Bridgminster. Since then there had always been an Ordham in Parliament, but the majority of the family were given over to the enjoyment of sport, and were noted mainly for their selection of beautiful wives and handsome husbands, rarely unendowed with the minor blessings of wealth and race. They had forgotten the origin of the factories still flourishing on the Yorkshire estate, but now far removed from covers and fields; to-night, however, Ordham, facing the contingency of Bridgminster's marriage, or his own failure to fall in love with a girl whose riches would be a fair exchange for the position he could give her, bitterly envied his wise and possibly unscrupulous ancestor, and would have welcomed similar outcroppings in his own brain.

Or suppose he married for mere love, a folly to which all young men were liable, and, upon his ridiculous income, found himself with a family upon his hands? This, however, he felt to be such a violent strain upon his imagination that he dismissed it, but found no consolation in the prospect of keeping up appearances, much less enjoying life, on a diminishing credit. He was too young, and too accustomed to see the creases of life magically smoothed, to remain dispirited for long, no matter what the combining causes; but during this hour he sat plunged in a melancholy so profound that for years after its bare memory appalled him.

There is a fine line between hypercivilization and degeneracy, too fine to be a barrier for unwary feet: but the natural nobility and refinement of Ordham's mind, com-

bined with its higher activities and poise, had brought him up short. No matter what his straits, even with his somewhat cynical attitude that all forms of vice were too inevitable to bother about, he was incapable of falling to the horrid level of these young continental nobles. But of what else might he not be capable? As his imagination, morbidly active, pictured him hopelessly involved, without a plank to grasp at, he suddenly swore an oath that he would never go under, no, not if he sacrificed all belonging to him, and every canon that society had invented for her own defence and deluded man into believing was handed down from on high. Ordham, fastidiously bred, and reared above the temptations that men of lower degree must reckon with in their daily struggle, was one of the most finished results of those same immemorial laws; but in this sudden vision of the horrors of poverty, of the terrors and temptations of life, they fell to ashes, and left him part savage, partly as cool, cynical, and unscrupulous, as only the supercivilized can be. He would never go under, never come down one step from the high position to which he had been born. If wishes could have slain Lord Bridgminster, he would have died that night in his Spartan bed. Ordham suddenly wondered if he were capable of killing his brother. He glanced about the restaurant once more, his gaze lingering on the gloomy face of the last of the line that had been illustrious in the history of Europe since it had emerged from the yoke of the Huns. He set his teeth and swore that he could, and without a scruple or a regret. He would never go under, never, never, never. But it was a solution by no means to his taste, and he left the restaurant abruptly and went for a walk of unaccustomed activity in the Englischergarten. When he reached his bed in the small hours his equilibrium was restored, and he reflected with amazement and horror upon the vitalities that had flourished unsuspected in the depths of his being. But his ego was somewhat excited and fascinated at the discovery, and he fell asleep wishing that he could talk it all over with Margarethe Styr.

VIII

PURPLE LILIES AND BITTER FRUIT

THAT night Styr sang *Isolde*. On the morning following, Ordham sent her a box of purple lilies. He expected no acknowledgment, for he knew that she ignored all offerings; but in the course of the afternoon he received a note which banished evil memories, including his struggles with Fräulein Lutz.

"DEAR MR. ORDHAM: I feel Isolde herself with these purple lilies in my hands. She was a great woman and no other colour is worthy of her. I have half promised to sing at Princess Nachmeister's concert to-morrow night, and now I have a fancy to cover myself with these lilies and sing the *Liebestod*. One needs inspiration of an uncommon sort when, unsupported by orchestra and footlights, one feels as if one might founder any moment in a sea of impertinent eyes. Your eyes, at least, are kind and encouraging. I will sing to you — for once — in memory of a picturesque hour designed by a king, and one of that unhappy monarch's rare triumphs.

"Thank you so much!

"MARGARETHE TANN."

This note so flattered and delighted him that he went voluntarily to call on Frau von Wass, and further beatified by finding her surrounded, made himself so charming to her guests that although, in spite of a murmured invitation, he would not linger, Hélène was tempted to believe that he kindled alone in the light of her smiles.

But he had no intention of bestowing a thought upon her except when circumstances forced him into her society. She had craved no more than her due, and for a fortnight longer she should have the benefit of all the courtesy he could summon, but not a shadow of superfluous attention. Little dreaming of what was pickling for him,

he had already consigned her to the past, and the only wish she inspired was the expiration of the fortnight. He was too indifferent constitutionally to speculate upon her sudden change of front, and too inexperienced, despite his cleverness, to be the match of any adventuress who wore the habit of his own world. With those profound and haunted abysses of wicked women he had had as little contact as with that practical side of life which tapers the wits and sharpens the vision. Ten years hence and the Hélène Wasses would be read and disposed of in short order; to-day he was but the good-natured, honourable, gullible young English aristocrat, who has been taken in time out of mind, and will continue to be until England is Americanized.

On the following evening he took his chair in the concert room of the Nachmeister Palast with an inner ferment so successfully concealed that his face was quite expressionless. For once he did not smile into every pair of eyes turned upon him. He thought of little but the note of Margarethe Styr, which he had read several times. Whatever her motive, he knew that a great compliment had been paid him; and although a too kindly fate disposed him to take most compliments as a matter of course, and humility disturbed him at rare intervals, to-night he was inclined to be not only exultant but grateful.

The immense room, with its old crimson brocades, its heavy dingy rococo gilding, its cosmopolitan assemblage, was an imposing sight, and Ordham was still young enough to love society. Parties at Excellenz Nachmeister's were seldom dowdy (unless too many royalties were present), and when, as to-night, the entire diplomatic corps was bidden, as well as many army officers and high officials, the men, in their beautiful uniforms, their orders and sashes, made an even more dazzling impression than the women. Uniforms at least were always new, and gowns did duty in aristocratic Munich for many seasons, regardless of changes in style. Waists too were large, and square, and soft; but the materials that covered them, whether old or new, were very rich, and jewels conceal

many defects. A few besides Hélène Wass could be relied upon to display the fashions of Paris, and the women of the diplomatic corps were always resplendent.

When Princess Nachmeister received in this room she wore a powdered wig and a brocade as stiff as a hoop-skirt, consequently was less of an eyesore than usual. Ordham had murmured his compliments, then after a hasty glance about — he arrived late — taken an empty chair between two people he did not know. Frau von Wass, a siren to-night in pale green tulle, water-lilies, and many pearls, left her seat, took a chair conspicuously apart, drew her eyelids into bows, and sent him a quiverful of arrows. All in vain.

A number of distinguished amateurs played and warbled brilliantly; for in the most musical city of northern Europe no one dared offend the hypercritical ear with a second-rate performance. Possart recited from *Manfred*. There was a small orchestra, and a tenor from Paris. At the end of two hours, when even the most artistic were thinking wistfully of supper and motion, there was a sharp rustle throughout the *Festsaal*, a deep intaking of breath: little Baron Walleypeg of the crooked smile had announced that Countess Tann had arrived at the last moment and would sing. (But he made the announcement in redundant phrases and tones of emotion, for he was a German, and he cherished a hopeless passion for Die Styr.)

She appeared suddenly on the platform at the head of the room and received a demonstration. Not only was she the artist best beloved in Munich, but surprise shattered the languor appropriate to so fashionable an occasion.

Ordham saw his lilies. They were in her hair, on her breast, on the front of her skirt. But what diverted his attention from this expected compliment was the surprise afforded by her evening gown. He had seen her only in the heavy white draperies affected by the heroines of Wagnerian romance, and in the still more classic costume she had worn at Neuschwanstein; he had supposed her to be a massive woman built for such rôles, and the more

untuned to private life. To-night she wore a closely fitting modish gown of maize-coloured tulle, in which the purple lilies seemed to grow. Her neck and arms were uncovered, every line of her figure was salient. She was almost slender, clean-limbed, with a low small bust, and hips barely accentuated. Her shoulders sloped gracefully, her waist was so round that it looked small if it was not. Ordham was familiar, of course, with her long round throat, the famous arms and hands, and he marvelled that he had not taken for granted that the rest of her figure was built in harmony. Then he wondered what part that incomparable form, which might have risen from the mould of Messalina, had played in her unhappy past; and fancied he understood why she veiled it from the public eye with so complete an indifference. Again he felt sorry for her, and more determined than ever to know her.

She wore her heavy dark hair in a low knot. Her skin, ivory-white, had the luminous effect he had often noted on the stage and missed at Neuschwanstein; her eyes were sullen and heavy, she held her head very high. To the surprise of her audience she sang them several folk-songs. When she paused, there was a spontaneous outburst of approval, then a vocal demand for more. The applause subsided, and as she smiled and bowed, they took for granted that their desire for these old songs of their hearts was about to be gratified.

She burst softly into the *Liebestod.* Her face remained as immobile as ivory, but she threw the soul of Isolde into her voice. It floated upward in the first rapture of delirium, and few but saw the wild face of the dying queen rise above the body of Tristan, the castle towers, the dead Kurwenal, the weeping figures of King Mark and Brängane, the army of retainers in the background. Ordham, at least, shared Isolde's vision of the valiant soul that had replaced the clay, as she sang, in tones heart-breaking in their sweet frenzy:

"Seht ihr's Freunde?
Säh't ihr's nicht?"

As her voice, rising on a higher and higher note, clear and sustained in the triumph of the seer, the heaven-given vision of the woman to whom her lost has been restored, it seemed the golden pathway upon which her own soul mounted to disappear among the stars. When she opened the flood-gates many gasped and wept; and Ordham, petrified, wondered if all the passion of the world were being swept out into eternity by that soul of Isolde, whom nothing but the passion of death could satisfy.

The voice, remote, dying, drawn to a mere crystal thread, sank away on the last lines:

"ertrinken,
versinken,
unbewusst—
höchste Lust!"

A great woman and her passion were dead and the world was poorer.

The applause was long and Styr was forced to return and bow many times; but when Baron Walleypeg announced that she would not sing again, the audience rose, and Ordham went in search of her. She had not glanced in his direction, but he chose to believe that she had kept her word and sung to him. He found her near the door of the supper room, surrounded by so dense a crowd of men and women that he could not approach within two feet of her. But she smiled at him, and a few moments later, when there was a break in the ranks, extended her hand. When he would have lifted it to his lips in the German fashion, which he privately thought beneath his dignity unless the hand were young and shapely, she shook his warmly, as if to remind him that she was an American. It was pleasant to feel a hearty clasp again, and he smiled with quick response, but asked her formally if it did not tire her to sing so often. She replied that nothing tired her; and then her ear was claimed by a personage in a light blue uniform embellished with many orders, whom she addressed as "Königliche Hoheit." It was impossible to interrupt her conversation with a prince

of the blood, but Ordham stood his ground and glanced about idly. Nothing could be more formal than Princess Nachmeister's dinners, and nothing less so than her suppers, when her guests, presumably, had had enough of the straight and narrow chairs of Louis XIV. Only the unfortunate royalties were marshalled to an alcove and seated about a table on a dais; the other guests stood, sat on little sofas, grouped about small tables, as they listed; the women waited upon, not only by the lackeys, but by the young officers and diplomatic attachés. Now and again the imposing and portly, who no doubt commanded the incessant service of their hausfraus at home, were moved to demonstrate their youthful agility.

Ordham's eye met the fixed gaze of Hélène Wass, sitting conspicuously apart. He nodded carelessly to the wife of the distinguished Geheimrath, heedless of the significance of the act, then coloured with annoyance as he turned to meet a glance of keen inquiry in the eyes of Margarethe Styr. Those eyes deliberately travelled from his to the siren in green tulle and water-lilies, and encountered a look of haughty defiance. Another dignitary offering his arm, she moved away, but gave Ordham a little nod and smile which seemed to say, "Later — *nicht wahr?*"

As he turned he could not avoid seeing that Frau von Wass was still strangely alone, and felt that he could do no less than offer his services. She was quite at the end of the room, and she had time to observe that he came on a leaden foot. Once more hatred flamed and almost routed the octopus of her love. She had leapt to the not unwarranted conclusion that there was an understanding between Ordham and the great singer whom no man pretended to know informally. The hand-shake and smile, the challenging glance at herself, caused the depths of the desperate woman to swarm with fighting devils, rushing on their armours and polishing their blades. She swore under her breath that she would ruin him if she could not have him, and her momentary hatred gave her a poise which, in her ferment, she might otherwise have been unable to

command. She smiled brightly when he finally stood before her.

"Bring me an ice and a cup of coffee," she said, in the pretty woman's careless tone of command, which he had thought so charming a few weeks ago. He left her with alacrity; then, as he never could find anything, it was quite fifteen minutes before he returned, followed by two servants bearing a small table and a delicate but abundant supper.

"Always the grand seigneur!" she said lightly. "Even one or two *Hoheits* are waiting on the ladies, and as for several of my husband's portly old confrères— Well! the less one expects of you the better."

She took a chair that gave her the advantage of sitting with her back to the room, and Ordham wondered if she meant to treat him to a scene, then reassured himself with the memory of her formal renunciation. And her present manner was light and agreeable, that of the gay young woman of the world.

"See how bored those poor dears are!" She indicated the segregated royalties. "Whatever else has been my unhappy fate, I can at least be thankful that I was not born a *Hoheit*. Do you know that all the queer people of my acquaintance I have met at one or other of the royal palaces? No wonder royalties grasp at the few liberties permitted them, and snatch at any straw that relieves their ennui."

"You met me at court," said Ordham, for want of something better.

"Oh, not at court. You forget I cannot go to court. We met at a rout at the Red Palace. Have you forgotten?"

"Of course not. Only these distinctions are beyond me. When do you break all our hearts by leaving Munich?"

"Fritz puts me off! But I shall get him away almost as soon as I planned. It is time!" The last sentence was delivered as from the mouth of a toy cannon, and he jumped.

"What is it?"

"Do you not see that I am ostracized? Did you not notice that I was driven to seat myself apart— like a pariah?"

"Well, you are here" — he answered vaguely. "It is not so easy — "

"You forget that Fritz is one of the Nachmeister's oldest and closest friends — a prehistoric lover, no doubt. No matter how much she may hate me, she will never insult him. But when he dies — "

"Oh, well, you do not like Munich and would live elsewhere in any case." Ordham's supper was turning to gall. Why would this woman always talk about herself?

"But the present? And if I should not be able to persuade Fritz to go, after all? Like all old men he is full of whims. It will be a martyrdom — I may as well tell you the cause. I learned it to-day. All your friends and admirers of my own dear sex have suddenly discovered that you see more of me than of any one else and have formed the one conclusion that can tickle the Munich palate. They have made up their minds that as yet you are not seriously in love with me, however, and have determined to get me out of the way before I have worked your ruin."

"Ruin?"

"Yes — It seems that I have a reputation! You would neglect your studies, miss your examinations, wreck your chances of a wealthy marriage — heaven knows what not! So they have made up their minds to put a stop to it."

"Made up their minds — " An odd light was kindling in Ordham's eyes, which no longer looked juvenile, or even absent.

"It is a cabal. I only learned of it by the merest chance — rather, to be exact, through the consideration of one faithful friend. They have agreed to cut me, drop me, mortify me so that I shall no longer have the courage to go anywhere. Meanwhile they will shower you with invitations that you may not have an instant's time to seek me. When you no longer meet me, even see me, of course you will forget my existence, after the fashion of volatile youth. Even the men that once liked me are in the plot, for they have guessed for a long time that I was interested in no one but you; and men are pettier than women."

She told this preposterous story with so much concen-

trated passion, such bitterness and venom of accent, that almost any man would have believed her. And Ordham was young and full of the vanity of youth. His eyes were blazing, his jaw line looked even longer than usual. She was quite aware that he mistook his natural (and British) resentment at coercion of any sort for righteous wrath, also, that by this time he knew something of the petty cabals and intrigues of European court society; whose smiling distaste for truth in any form, he had once remarked to her, made even his diplomatic soul feel blunt and Anglo-Saxon.

"They have persuaded themselves that they think only of your welfare, that extraordinary future they all predict for you. But they know what their real motive is! It is their opportunity to cast me out, a pleasure too long deferred. And out, I suppose, I must go."

"Well, I will go with you." This came through his teeth. "How dare they?"

Her eyes dilated, but she dropped her lashes. She was not so carried away by her victory as to lose sight of its contributing cause. To ask him now if he loved her, to pin him down, might be fatal.

"Dare? They have taken you up to such an extent that they look upon themselves as the natural arbiters of your destiny. They are devoted to you. They have made you the fashion. Not tamely will they sit by and watch their work undone. If you want the whole truth," she ran on with her amazing fertility, "they even wish to make you one of them. They have decided upon the Brobdingnagian daughter of the rich Herr von Schmidt, whose beer is justly famous. She is to be presented privately to the Queen-mother, and then she will be formally on the market. She looks as if she had beer in her very veins, and her ankles are as thick as my waist. But what does that signify? She is the only child of an ennobled Schmidt and will inherit millions. They will succeed! They will succeed! They are so clever — and you — you are so indolent — you would accept any one determined to marry you. It is your destiny to be man-

aged, and when these friends fling garlands about your neck and gold dust into your eyes, you will murmur: 'What a bore, but why not? My family expect something of the sort. What matter a yellow skin and thick ankles?' While I — I —" She pounded the table in her mounting passion, no longer entirely simulated. "I shall be an outcast. Once out, they will never let me in again. Fritz, stupid as he is, will notice, inquire; he will treat me as badly as the rest. I shall have the whole world against me. I have always had the whole world against me. Those words will be found flaming in my heart when I am dead. Even if I left Munich, these people would hound me. It is my destiny. I can never escape it — never! never! You cannot understand; you, who were born at the top, who would compel deference for that alone if you committed the seven deadly sins, if you wore rags in Australia — while I — I, the daughter of a small merchant, — even if I had married a duke, the world would never let me forget that I was born bourgeois. And a mere ritter, like Fritz — "

"Oh, please, please compose yourself! Let us go into another room." Ordham was cold with terror. A scene threatened him, with all Munich as audience. She had stirred his anger, his dramatic sense, his pity; but for the moment he had no thought of her. She controlled herself so quickly and completely, however, that he was moved to admiration. "Forgive me," she said quietly, wishing that she had worn black velvet instead of this frivolous Lorelei costume, but contriving to look dignified in spite of her flushed cheeks and suffused eyes. "How could I forget myself? But I was carried away by the thought of that abominable cabal — remember that I only heard of it this afternoon. I wonder if they will succeed?"

"Of course not."

She stared at him, fascinated, as she had done on the day of their reconciliation. Again his brain seemed to cast its shadow of maturity over his face. This singular effect, combined with his youthful bloom and indolent strength, entranced the blasée woman choking with the dregs of

life. With a last effort she controlled herself again. He had had as much as he could stand for one evening; better she go home and mature her plans. She rose and drew herself up, looking far more the great lady than many of the homely shapeless women whose pedigrees ran back into the Holy Roman Empire. "I shall go now," she said. "Will you tell a lackey to call my carriage?"

He went with her into the courtyard, and as he bade her good-night, she said softly: "You will come to-morrow?"

"Of course."

"I shall expect you."

He returned hastily to the house in the hope of a word with Margarethe Styr. But she had gone; and he took his own leave immediately, almost scowling at his many good friends, and wondering if any young man had ever been thrown into such perturbation before.

IX

EXCELLENZ, THE POTTER

THE next morning he was rejoiced by the news that Fräulein Lutz was confined to the house by a severe *katarrh*, and he remained in bed until twelve, meditating upon the position in which he found himself. He had slept well — nothing had ever kept him awake — and he discovered that refreshed by sleep and coffee, to say nothing of the brilliant sunlight streaming over his bed, he hated his friends less than he had supposed the night before. He would be managed by nobody, but women were born matchmakers; it was not an unamiable vice; why should he resent their efforts in his behalf? He had not the least apprehension of being married against his will, and the painful picture of Fräulein von Schmidt no longer maddened him. Last night he had felt almost trapped, so communicable had been the excitement of that poor little woman.

He endeavoured to analyze his feeling for Frau von Wass. (He had never called her Hélène even in his thoughts.) Could it be that he was really fond of her? Certainly his soul had risen in arms last night as she poured out her wrongs, passionately dwelt upon her isolation. "With all the world against her." It was a phrase to affect any man with a rag of feeling in him.

Unconsciously he shook his head. He was not in love with her. On that point at least he was quite clear. But he was uneasily sensible that events might rush too rapidly for his guidance. Were she ostracized on his account, cast out, perhaps, by an infuriated husband, there was no folly that he might not be induced to commit, particularly when his family combined in opposition. Although he

had no suspicion of the plot hatching by Frau von Wass, a new light rose in his mind and played about the dangers of inspiring such a woman with a desperate passion. It is true that she had announced her complete recovery, but her eyes had betrayed her last night; moreover, he could not doubt that she had made a deliberate appeal to his pity, his tenderness, his humanity. Could it be that she wanted to elope with him? He broke into a cold perspiration. A moment later he was out of bed and writing her a note protesting that he was too ill to call on her that afternoon; he was really in a pitiable condition and must break all his engagements. Would she forgive him and let him call the instant he was presentable? Perhaps she would honour him at a little dinner he intended to give during the following week at one of the restaurants? Which did she prefer? And would Friday suit her? He would speak to Princess Nachmeister as soon as he could get out.

The Wass disposed of for at least three days, he shoved the memory of her into one of those wonderful water-tight compartments of his brain, and, returning to the pleasant places, met Margarethe Styr. Whether he wanted to know any woman again well he was not sure, but his experience of this isolated creature on the strange night of their meeting gave him hope that she had outlived the vanities and follies of her sex. He wondered that a woman to whom the fiery furnace of life had left no precipitation but mind could retain so much of feminine charm. Or was it but the magnetism of a strong brain, with the sauce piquante of fine manners? It would be worth while to discover. No beauty, so far, had appealed to his senses as odd and complex personalities did to his cool analytical brain. And how delightful even the occasional companionship of such a woman might be! Yes, he would know her if he could.

He did not care to call and run the risk of being turned from her door, but after the deliberate compliment she had paid him he felt at liberty to write and crave admittance. He was very guarded in expressing himself, for he had all

a young man's sensitive fear of being laughed at by a woman so much older in years and in life; the enterprises of blasée women of the world, and mothers with marriageable daughters, while they had augumented a self-confidence as inevitable as his grammar, had not disposed of his natural modesty.

He sent the note by a messenger, but no reply came until the following morning. It was very brief.

"DEAR MR. ORDHAM: I have hesitated a long time — but it is better not. Friends are not for me. I shall not even go into society again for a long while. Think of me as a stage creature only. And after all, I am nothing else.

"MARGARETHE TANN."

This put Ordham into such a villanous humour that he went out and lunched alone.

"Does she think that I want to make love to her?" He addressed the dinner (alas! not luncheon), which was very bad. "Little she knows! And whoever would be the wiser if I called out there occasionally? Or is she merely trying to *intriguer* me? Is it that inflexible principle of sex which will not let a man go in peace, but must hold him in the toils even while denying him the little he asks? Or does she fear to step down from her pedestal? Well, I'll think no more about her. I hate them all."

He returned to the Legation in time for coffee, and to help Mr. Trowbridge entertain several pretty women that had lunched there. Later he called at the Nachmeister Palast, sure of not meeting Frau von Wass; she, with many another, never entered the gates save when bidden to a function. Several old ladies were taking tea with Excellenz, and they increased our hero's ill humour by their maternal petting, for he was almost as tired of being mothered as of being made love to. Nachmeister's sole charm was her entire indifference to his health and his emotions.

When the women had gone, she invited him into her famous porcelain boudoir, where the walls were made up of innumerable panels painted by a disciple of Watteau, the windows and chairs covered with fading brocades; and

exhibited a photograph of Mabel Cutting that had arrived in the morning mail. Of the note enclosed by the young beauty's mamma, the wise old diplomatist said nothing.

"Is she not lovely?"

Ordham scowled at the picture. "All American girls look alike. I saw them by wholesale in Paris."

"I do not pretend to vie with such experience, but, myself, I never saw anything so lovely as Mabel. Leaning on that railing, she looks like The Blessed Damozel. But it should be painted. Of course it gives no idea of her exquisite colouring — pink and white and gold and brown. And such soft pathetic eyes!" The Nachmeister looked almost sad.

"Those fluffy American beauties are passée at twenty-five. I like women to be handsome at forty — as our women are," he hastened to add.

"Of course, mon enfant. At your age the woman of forty, or a little less, nicht? is part of Life's curriculum. So is the unhappy wife who wants sympathy — and all the rest of them. Fortunately there are the Mabel Cuttings to marry."

"Is she being trotted out for my inspection?"

"What if she were? Do you fancy that you can ever do better? Youth, beauty, gentle blood, millions — and you merely look bored? I have no patience with you."

"I am in no hurry to marry."

"But one day you must — is it not so? I can speak plainly, for I am an old woman of the world that has grown fond of you, and there is no mystery about you whatever. Inheritance to the titles and estates of your family is by no means assured, at best is remote. You are entering one of the most expensive of careers and your habits are extravagant. Your income is small and your brother miserly. So do not be the baby you sometimes look and are not, and give Mabel Cutting a definite place in your calculations."

"What has she in her own right?"

"Eight or ten millions — dollars, of course. Forty million marks! Ach Gott! I have known Adela Cutting for

twenty years. There is no doubt whatever that her husband's fortune was one of the largest in America; and I remember perfectly the account of his death and will. There were no other heirs."

"What of this plot to marry me to the daughter of Herr von Schmidt?"

"What?" The Nachmeister's astonishment was manifestly genuine.

"I heard — well, it is not worth talking about."

"I should think not. Marie Schmidt! You! Her silly mother has never put stays on her and she will have a Munich waist in three years. And her complexion, her manners — but it does not matter. I happen to know that she is to marry her cousin, Heinrich Krauss. Schmidt means to keep the money in the family. Who could have started such a report?"

"Oh, one hardly knows where one hears such things."

"Another time come to me at once with any little rumours that put you out of temper, and I will tell you if they are correct or not. There are no secrets in Munich from me. I may keep them, but I know them."

"May I borrow this photograph?" Ordham looked as innocent as Moses in the bulrushes.

"You may have it — and the original, no doubt, if you are clever enough. But to tell you the truth, I do not know whether she retains her interest in you or not. It was evident enough when she was here; but maids as well as men are fickle."

Ordham enthroned the photograph on his writing table. He even began a letter to Mrs. Cutting. But he could think of no excuse that would cover his long negligence, and after dreaming over his pen for a while he put it aside until a more fertile moment. But fate pursued its even way and drove Mabel Cutting far from his mind.

X

THE BIRTH OF AN ARTIST

THE following night he was paddling on the Isar when he became aware that he approached the house of Margarethe Styr. It stood on a branch of the river that separated the Englischergarten from Schwabing, an old village now incorporated in the city of Munich. From the back projected a tower whose foundation was not in the garden, but in the bed of the stream. Her grounds were surrounded by a high wall, and on the day he had left his card he had seen nothing of the house but its baroque façade; but more than one of his friends, when driving him in the park, had pointed out the tower and commented upon the lonely dwelling of the Styr. There was a story that Ludwig I had built this villa for a beautiful woman of Siena, intending to visit her by way of the Isar, which flowed not far from the palace walls. The lady, however, could not make up her mind to brave the rigours of the North, and it had become the property of a romantic young couple, whose grandchildren had sold it to the present King when the whim seized him to present a dwelling to the Styr.

Ordham did not rest on his oars, but used them more slowly perhaps as he raised his face, hoping for a glimpse of the great artist whom he still permitted himself to admire even if no longer consumed by a desire to know her. Just as the boat slipped past the tower such a shriek of horror rang from the lowest of its rooms, that Ordham, without hesitating a second, reached the shore with a stroke and swung himself through a window in the opposite curve. He expected to find Countess Tann struggling in the arms of a burglar, and was astonished to see her standing

alone in the middle of the room, staring down through the window to which he had raised his eyes as the boat rounded the corner. He did not enter noiselessly, but it was fully a moment before she turned. Then she drew a spasmodic breath of relief.

"Of course — you! But when I saw that white face down in the water — your face down there did look so white — I thought it was —"

Although the room was nearly dark he could see that she made an effort to recover her natural poise, and she added: "Thank you for coming to my rescue. Of course you thought I was being murdered?"

"Or Kundry!" He was recovering from his own fright.

"Oh, don't jest! I have had a terrible shock. You have no idea what your face down there brought back. I thought it was the ghost of a young man who once gave his life for me; and yet there is no reason why he should haunt me. I begged him to go."

His complete silence expressed his right to hear the story, and in a moment it was evident that she would tell it. Her head was bent, her brows drawn, giving her eyes the expression of tragedy most familiar to him. The shock, no doubt, had set her sense of drama in action. He wondered if it were ever far from the surface of the artist that lived for his art, as this woman did.

"I will tell you," she said at length. "Why not? You have come into my life in odd ways. As oddly you compel me to talk. I even wrote you long letters — and tore them up. I have told you that I was on the stage in America. I always had small parts, but I had some influence, nevertheless. Over there it is called 'pull' — but you never use slang, do you? I scarcely ever went 'on the road,' as another phrase goes. But one summer, after I had been cultivating my voice for about three years with the old Wagnerian devotee I had discovered in New York, I quarrelled with a man I had come to hate, and, it being impossible that he should leave New York, I made up my mind to join a travelling company that would demand my

services for months to come. It was not the salary of an actress that I needed in order to put the continent between us, but the protection of the company. Women in that great free country, to be admitted to hotels, or at least to remain in them, must be accompanied by some member of their family, by some man who at least pretends to be their husband, must be known (favourably known), must be shabbily respectable, or must have a raison d'être. An actress travelling with a company has always the right to live, no matter if she can do nothing but dust the furniture. So I went barnstorming, and, accustomed to luxury as I had grown, I was very uncomfortable, disgusted; no doubt, had I been less hardy, I should have fallen ill. If the adventure I am about to relate had not happened, I might not have — I might have returned to New York in a very different fashion. My voice might not have been enough. I cannot tell.

"We played across the continent to San Francisco, then up to Portland, Oregon, intending to return in the same leisurely manner by the northern route from Seattle. We took the steamer from Portland. It is an infamous piece of coast, called, indeed, the 'graveyard of the Pacific,' but the weather was fair, and as there are only twenty or thirty wrecks a year, everybody in that optimistic section of the country expects to be among the favoured. Before night one of those terrible winds of the North Pacific suddenly descended upon us. I had often crossed the Atlantic, but I had never heard such a wind, seen such waves. Only the old phrase, 'mountains high,' gives any impression the waves made upon me, at least. Nearly everybody was ill. I remained on deck, enjoying the storm, the roaring wind, the great green glassy waves with their soft white combs. There was no rain, and the sky, as we rolled about, seemed to shake out the folds of a spangled flag. I soon noticed an athletic young fellow trying to stride up and down the deck. He gave it up after a time, and, having helped me to my feet, after I had gone for the third time into the scuppers, we fell into conversation. He was a Harvard man, had been visiting relatives in San Francisco, and was

on his way to British Columbia for some shooting before returning to his home in Boston. He confessed that he had cultivated sport to such an extent that he had neglected his studies, and intended to take a post-graduate course. I do not recall anything else that he said, but he looked so young, so strong, so clean and thoroughbred, that I liked him, as I have always liked the few of his type that I have met. After a time he advised me to go to my room and get some sleep. I bade him good-night; and although my small state-room was close and crowded, I soon fell asleep. I knew nothing more until we were on the rocks."

She flung out those famous expressive hands of hers. "That awful scene of confusion! The sharp animal-like cries of the women! The hoarse yells and curses of the men! The frantic rush! The horrible darkness — for every light went out. Finally I found myself on deck — swept there, I suppose, by that fighting mass of people. But it was all unreal at first, like a scene in the theatre. I remember hearing the leading lady sob: 'Oh, Gawd, I'll never do it no more, I swear I won't!' and laughing.

"Then I saw that the atmosphere was impenetrable. I learned afterward that the captain had entered those terrible straits in a dense fog. And then I heard the grinding and pounding of the ship on the rocks, the roar and hiss of breakers. The signal gun scattered the shrieks that never stopped for a second. The ship gave a violent lurch. I saw a green wall rushing through the fog and flung myself face downward, throwing my arms about a smokestack. When the wave had receded and I recovered my breath, I found myself alone and saw dark objects tossing on the water.

"There were no more screams, but there were other sounds — I cannot describe them! Suddenly I felt myself lifted up and a voice said: 'Come quickly. There will be another wave. And we are sinking.' I recognized the voice of the young Bostonian. He half carried me to the top of the pilot-house, where a few others were huddled. The fog lifted. I could see still others clinging to the higher parts of the boat, but nearly every one had been

washed overboard. By this time lights were flashing all along the shore, and we expected every moment that boats would put out to our rescue. But the seas were running at a frightful rate. I heard later that more than one boat was launched, but unable to fight the energy of those heaving mountains.

"One end of the steamer was below water. The other was pounding horribly; we merely waited for her to free herself and plunge to the bottom. More than once she slipped — twisted — When morning came the pilot-house was but a few feet above water. My young friend lashed me to a mast. How I climbed it with him I cannot tell you, but I did, and was firmly tied. He stood on a rung just below me and held my hand. He had already wrapped his coat about me. There was no more rope, even for him. I saw the others washed away, one by one. They went in silence. At first I implored him not to leave me to die alone, and he promised that he would not. But finally I begged him to try to swim to the shore. He was so strong, and we now could see people running up and down, a boat launching, even fancied we heard cries of encouragement. Surely they would manage to pick him up even although they might not reach the ship. But he would not. He said that a man could die only once, and that he should be ashamed to call himself an American if he deserted a woman in an hour like that.

"It will always be incredible to me that they did not make a more persistent effort to save us than they did. And his life was worth saving! The day passed. We saw a steam tug, evidently telegraphed for; but after hanging about for an hour it went away again without making any attempt to approach us. Another night passed. The gale did not diminish for an instant. I was stiff, frozen, hungry, a mere bundle of automatic nerves. Will, memories, reason, all that make the individual, might have gone to find a grave for my tortured body. But I was safe so long as the ship gripped the rock. With him it was a different matter. He was strong and young, but he was not a god, and *he was not lashed* to the mast. He spoke

to me from time to time, but his hold on my hand relaxed more than once, and I knew that he was in agony.

"I fell asleep. When I awakened, in a moment or two, no doubt, I called to him in terror, for, had he too slept, he must have fallen and been washed away. He answered me in a moment, and then I roused myself from my lethargy and talked constantly. He held out till morning. Almost with the dawn I saw a glittering green mountain, that seemed to smoke like a volcano, rise above the ship, bend down, slip under my friend, roar again and recede, holding triumphantly aloft that straight young figure. For the first time in my life I forgot myself and wept for the fate of another. Then I set my teeth in the face of that demoniacal storm and swore that I would not be conquered. I had survived Life. I would defy the mere elements. I thought of my voice, the voice my master had begged me, literally on his knees, to consecrate to the greatest rôles ever written. Sometimes he had thrilled me with an appetite for fame, independence, but intermittently; perhaps because, although I had read those rôles again and again, I had never heard them, above all never known the ecstasy of singing them (he made me grind at tone production, scales, difficult exercises); perhaps because I was by no means giving my life to music alone. But now, abruptly, the artist awoke to life. Alone in that raging waste of water, with death tugging at my very feet and screaming in my ears, I was born into the religion of art, received the sign that I had been chosen to worship at that shrine, to be blest, to be lifted to its highest places — I — I — of all women! I saw far beyond those hungry waters. I no longer regretted my friend. What mattered it — the death of one mere mortal? I heard the cries of the Valkyrs as they rode across the sky on their winged horses. The black clouds rolled apart and I saw Wotan on his throne in Walhalla, the daughters of Erda, my sisters, about him . . . they besought him. . . . I could see the streaming of their hair, the flashing of their helmets and shields, as they ran back and forth, leaned over the ramparts to encourage me with their cries: 'Hi — ya — ha! Ho — yo — to — ho!'

I was Brünhilde on her rock. The waves were fire. Ah!" Styr flung her arms upward, her body backward, swaying from side to side. "I shall never have such exquisite delusions again. Never! Never! For one hour — or was it one moment? — I was a goddess. It was no delusion! I was Brünhilde, awaking from a sleep, not of a generation, but of the centuries that had gone since she rode into the funeral pyre. I try to recall that ecstasy on the stage. Some of it comes back, but not all! Not all! I have a fancy that Death will bring it in his hand when he comes again."

She dropped her arms, and her groping hand closed over the back of a chair. "I remember nothing of the rescue. I awoke in bed. They told me that I had slept for two days and nights, that I had been lashed to the mast for forty hours, alone for ten. They asked my name. I gave the first insignificant combination that entered my head. Charitable people advanced the money for my return to New York. I had money of my own there, for I had made profitable investments, when the whim for playing with gold instead of spending it had seized me. I revealed myself to no one but my banker and my singing teacher, and lived in obscure lodgings until I was pronounced fit to go to Bayreuth and ask The Master to listen to my voice. So far as any one else that had ever heard of me knew, I was dead, dead with the rest of that miserable company. And I was dead — for must not one die to be born again?"

XI

THE DIPLOMATIC TEMPERAMENT

ORDHAM had been leaning against the wall, staring at her, carried out of himself. He had heard the roar of the waters, the fragment of ship pounding on the rocks, seen the solitary woman lashed to the mast for an eternity, witnessed the tragedy of the gallant youth in whose death he felt a poignant sense of loss. Once or twice he shivered, as when Styr screamed on the stage, or her voice seemed to come from some far hidden bower, dying of languor, in the love duet of *Tristan und Isolde*.

She passed through an archway and lit a lamp. As she turned and motioned him to a chair she thought she had never seen any one look so young. Every memory in his brain but this last might have withered and floated away. He recovered himself and followed her into what appeared to be a long gallery used as a living room.

"Thank you for telling me," he said. "I think he deserved that one man should honour his memory. Why don't you sit on this comfortable divan?"

He arranged the pillows about her, took a chair close by, and accepted a cigarette; which, he felt, he had never needed more. She did not smoke, but sat staring straight before her. Her eyes seemed to burn her white face, but her repose was absolute. In a few moments she spoke abruptly.

"Twice I have lifted the curtain for you. I hope I never may again. It is not good for me and can be of no use to you. All that know me here are concerned only with my present—"

"Yes, with Die Styr, not Margarethe Styr."

"I have little private life, but you seem to have been

projected into it, and you may remain if you think it would interest you to come here and talk to me occasionally."

He did not answer her, for he was wondering again if he wanted to know her or not. Was not his personal experience of this famous woman already romantic and adventurous enough to satisfy any man not in love? Whatever it may have amused him to fancy before they met, that night at Neuschwanstein had convinced him that he never should love her. The woman was too wholly suffocated by the artist. Even now he hardly realized that he was not in the presence of Brynhildr or Iseult, summoned to earth by the necromancy of the mad King. Certainly he had shared her delusion for a moment to-night. But he was a modern of the moderns. There was nothing of the old gods in him. It was only when Styr sang that the dead men in his soul awoke and surrendered. Contact with herself did not stir his senses in the least, although it agitated his mind.

If there be such a thing as the diplomatic temperament, John Ordham may be said to have possessed it. Side by side with the recklessness of youth and a sensitive nature, marched already a tendency to regard life as a sort of musical instrument whose keys were to be touched delicately, warily; crashing chords to be struck at precisely the right moment or not at all — whatever the temptation. It was hardly more than an instinct as yet, but he had made surprisingly few mistakes for a man of his years. In spite of his British reserve he had little of the narrow conservatism of his race; his tastes, his sympathies, his points of view, were catholic. Nevertheless, even the acquaintances made outside of his own world were never of a character to cause him future annoyance; and when he tired of them, they experienced pangs of self-reproach, or chafed at relentless fate. As the natural grace of his body saved him in difficult social moments, its mental partner gently extricated him from the most delicate situations. In spite of that stratum of iron in his nature, he would never be brutal, but he might be more ruthless and inflexible where his interests, or perhaps his desires, were

concerned, than the more primitive being who sticks knife into a rival or beats his woman.

But if insensible to the sex in this woman whom many men had loved, still loved, his mind was on the bri of an irresistible attraction. It was not so much that l secrets and her depths tormented his curiosity, as that l intellect called to his with that vague seductive promise completion which is usually confined to the whispers sex.

He turned his head and looked at her. Her eyes w staring far beyond him again, and his slight motion not attract her attention. Her hair was half down, l her skin, although white and clear, had none of the fre ness of youth. Her figure, in its loose white gown, look massive, immobile. He had a sudden conviction that s would never receive him in a revealing gown, that could not be more determined than she to keep their int course on the rational plane. In a flash he comprehend her intense loathing of his sex. She had demolished barrier for his sake, either because she had decided t fate was too strong or because their chance intimacy h forced her to appreciate the loneliness of her life. Do in the depths of his being he fancied that he heard sharply struck note of warning, but it was stifled und a rush of sympathy and mental avidity.

He felt an intense desire to relieve the tension of t moment and uttered the first commonplace that came his mind:

"Should I not go? You look pale. Your skin has l its wonderful luminousness—"

She replied indifferently, "I did not put it on," th laughed. "Are you horrified?"

"Not in the least. Why should not a complexion be fine a work of art as a canvas that hangs on the line? for nature—I have seen nothing so exquisite in Venice the pictures of Turner."

"I have worked out a make-up which enables me to lude the world into the belief that I am a beauty. But is not merely these minor arts that disguise me; I

transfigured, even when I merely sing Venus or Senta; and that is the reason I have never been recognized in Bayreuth, where the elect of America are beginning to flock."

"You change your eyes in both size and expression, but I should know you."

"Now, perhaps, that my characters have become a part of myself." She added abruptly, "I believe you know nothing in England of Ibsen, but he is the only dramatist who, in some moods, makes me wish that I were on the other stage."

"I made my first teacher in Munich translate several of his plays: first, because it was a straight path away from declensions, then because I became interested. I never miss an Ibsen night, unless it happens to be one of yours. I hardly know whether I like him or not — yes, I suppose I do; that is to say, he fascinates my mind, while I resent him with all my inherited particles, that cry out in favour of illusions and lies."

"Ah!" She looked at him with keen interest. "It may be those uncompromising pictures of middle-class life, mean, sordid, bare, that excite your mere curiosity — you are a pampered baby yourself. But you are too young to hate shams."

"I am sure that I love them. Perhaps he merely induces an irritability of mind, which is a novel sensation. I shouldn't wonder if I really hated him. I cannot imagine you in any of these rôles. You do not suggest his heroines — you whose mission it is to give intense reality to impossible romance."

"In other words you deny my right to be called an actress?"

"Oh! oh! How can you say such a thing? I have a theory that Wagner's music changed the character of the void itself. The souls floating downward vibrated to the new harmonies, the least of them; and now and again a great one was saturated, absorbed, imperiously impelled —"

"I never heard a more ingenious theory, but considering that *Tristan* was written in '57–'59, and *Götterdämmerung* nearly fifteen years later —"

"Souls sometimes sleep a long while," he said softly.

For the first time he saw her flush. Then she sat erect suddenly.

"I won't permit you to question my right to be called an actress! You remember the scene in *Ghosts* in which Mrs. Alving listens to Oswald's terrible revelation?"

He nodded, holding his breath. She did not rise, nor repeat a word of the play, but he watched her skin turn grey, her muscles bag, the withering cracking soul stare through her eyes. Every part of her face expressed a separate horror, and he could have sworn that her hair turned white. He shivered as if he had fallen into the snow water beneath the tower, and stood up.

"It is too horrible! I am glad there is no such part in opera."

She smiled triumphantly and Mrs. Alving vanished. But she turned pale again as he asked abruptly:

"Was it of Mrs. Alving you were thinking?"

"Yes and no. It was Mrs. Alving on a superstructure. For the moment I was that tormented mother, but were I merely a clever actress that had left a pleasant home for the stage, I might make myself feel — well — half, perhaps, of what I expressed for your benefit just now."

He asked irresistibly, "Are you glad or sorry?"

"Glad." And neither had the vaguest premonition of when and where she would answer that question at length.

"I think I shall go now. It is late and I have kept you up long enough. Thank you so much."

"What are you thanking me for?"

"Everything. When may I come again?"

"Tuesday evening for supper, if you are not invited."

"Of course I shall come."

They shook hands and Ordham left as he had entered. As he rowed up the Isar and heard the iron shutters slam, he felt some exultation in the thought that no longer were they closed to him. And he knew that an atmosphere both bracing and quickening was his to command. There was the scent of neither violets nor patchouli in it, in other words, neither bland conservatism nor commonplace out-

lawry. He was too modern for the one and too fastidious for the other. He could not identify scent at all with Margarethe Styr, not even those rare and subtle perfumes fabricated for the elect, among whom was himself; and this a little disappointed him.

XII

LA BELLE HÉLÈNE

On strange and brittle threads hang the apples of fate. Hélène Wass had matured her plan for the following Wednesday night. Like all plans promising success, it was very simple. She divined Ordham's nervous dread of finding himself alone with her, but parties at her house were always gay, and he was ever more than willing to be amused. She invited him to dinner "to meet a party of friends from Vienna who were giving her a night on their way to Paris." Upon arrival he would discover that the party had disappointed her, but he could not well refuse to eat her dinner; nor could he run away immediately after. The Herr Geheimrath never graced these late dinners of his wife, adhering stoutly to the heavy midday meal of his ancestors, and partaking of a Spartan supper of eggs, cold ham, sausage, tongue, salad, and compôte at six o'clock. At eight he was slumbering peacefully. The dainty French repast finished, Hélène would sing in her boudoir, — all the newest, gayest songs, — until Ordham's apprehensions, if he cherished any, were lulled, and he had made himself too comfortable to think of moving before eleven o'clock, at least. Then she would confide to him a long list of new indignities, visited upon her by Munich society and her old husband, gradually working herself up into a mighty passion — no difficult matter at any time — and when, in a climax of uncontrollable excitement, she had flung herself into his arms, her faithful maid, having awakened the virtuous Geheimrath, would usher him in at precisely the right moment and exhibit the scandalous tableau. She would shriek and sob and plead for forgiveness, which, she well knew, would never kindle in that

flabby mass of vanity, shocked out of the fatuousness of a lifetime. Ordham, of course, would not plead his innocence, and when she cowered to the floor, wailing that now indeed all the world was against her, he would walk over and take his place at her side. There would be no duel, for the Herr Geheimrath had chronic rheumatism in his right shoulder, and she would leave Munich with the young Englishman at eight o'clock on the following morning.

She had not the least doubt that, given conditions as she planned them, Ordham would go with her, and that between sympathy and Italy — her villa was romantically situated in the Alban Hills — she could persuade him that he loved the dainty versatile charming creature who had sacrificed the world for his sake. And, it may be, the vanity of youth being very great indeed, she would continue to win in the uneven game.

Hélène Wass was as clever as only a subtle unscrupulous highly seasoned European can be. She belonged to a class that responds automatically to the intrigues hatched under thrones and disseminated to the outposts of society; in whose brains are dark and tortuous recesses furrowed by generations of ancestors that have lied and schemed for royal favour; and what birth had not given her, she had industriously colonized in the rich soil of her brain for twenty years.

But the cleverest of mere mortals, even the wise old statesman at the helm, is unable to see far into that dense belt just beyond his horizon, can but guess at the forces generating there. Hélène Wass's inimical forces were trivial, almost ridiculous, but less have wrecked life and reputation.

She had written a month since to her Parisian milliners to set to work on her summer trousseau at once, for even then she had contemplated a house party in her Italian villa, where Ordham would find it difficult to dodge her. On the day of their apparent reconciliation she telegraphed orders that it be sent at once. If delivered to her in Munich, her husband must pay the bill, to say nothing of

the duties. Munich had denounced her extravagance as regularly as the seasons called their attention to it; but she was, in truth, a thrifty creature, and had kept her own inheritance, capital and income, intact. The Italian villa was her only personal extravagance, and Wass supported that. This trousseau, in spite of letters and telegrams, was unaccountably delayed. Go without it she would not, and not only for economical reasons, but because it was already hot in Italy, and she depended in no small measure upon these exquisite diaphanous garments for the ultimate conquest of her observing young lover.

It had been a mere chance that had taken Ordham on the Isar that night, or, to speak by the book, an undetected chain of circumstances. Paddling on the river in the city limits was a privilege granted to few, but a friend of Ordham, Count Kilchberg, whose garden sloped to the banks, had long since invited him to use a boat whenever he chose; and on the night when he had so unpremeditatedly won the friendship of Margarethe Styr, he had, after excusing himself from a dinner where he was likely to meet Frau von Wass, suddenly bethought himself of this novel and congenial way of passing the evening.

The trousseau arrived on Monday, and, still unpacked, was ready to be spirited out of the house by the annoyed but acquisitive Lotte, who, as a guardian of secrets and a surgeon of obstacles, received a salary rather than a wage, and was meditating respectable matrimony at no distant date. Lotte, although profoundly indifferent to moral lapses, did not like Italy and was in love with a valet de chambre in the Residenz. She was in a bad humour at the proposed flight, but dared not forsake her mistress, who, beyond question, would give her a wedding present. On Tuesday morning the Herr Geheimrath suddenly took it into his fussy old head to go to Berlin and attend a scientific conference. He invited Hélène to accompany him, and she screamed her refusal, almost beside herself. Assuming that she was merely more nervous than usual, he departed in haste, promising to bring her a present,

and to return in the course of ten days; he needed a little vacation and should see many of his old friends.

She spent the greater part of Tuesday in bed, after her fashion when her astonished ego was forced to admit that there were conflicting egos in the world which her stupid patron saint went to sleep and forgot. She wept, she had hysterics, she bit several handkerchiefs to pieces, she tormented herself with visions of Ordham's sudden recall to England before her husband's return; finally, in a flash of blinding light, saw him infatuated with Margarethe Styr. That cordial hand-shake, that unstereotyped smile, had meant something from the woman who would have the world believe that she dwelt on a pedestal — in a niche — with a curtain in front of her. Ordham, true to his temperament, had not mentioned his meeting with Styr at Neuschwanstein, but Hélène knew of the visit, and leaped at conclusions not far from the truth. Of course he was fascinated, no doubt was talking Wagner (they were sure to begin on Wagner) with her at that very moment.

She sprang out of bed and ordered her victoria brought round in an hour. She must have movement, diversion, or her mind would become so inflamed that she could not plan, and a new plan was imperative, unless, indeed, she found the self-control to await her husband's return.

It was a cold spring with occasional warm days. Lotte, anxious to shake out one of the new gowns, expatiated upon the weather. Frau von Wass, soothed by the thought that she could always command the envy of Munich, permitted herself to be arrayed in a gown and hat designed to make its wearer look as like a butterfly as a mere mortal can. The parasol, the slippers and stockings, the gloves and handkerchief, assisted to transform her into at least the Parisian she loved to be mistaken for, and she forgot her woes for an hour in the delight of showing herself. But she by no means forgot Ordham and directed her coachman to drive in the Englischergarten, where he occasionally strolled with Kilchberg and other friends. The beautiful day had brought out all Munich, driving,

riding, walking; the great park was filled with good natured saunterers, many of whom stared in open admiration, amazement, or disapproval at the dazzling vision behind the liveries of the excellent Geheimrath Wass.

But she saw nothing of the young Englishman. She ordered her coachman to leave the park by the Schwabing entrance and drive to the tennis court on the other side of the village. This was a sacred enclosure, which, with all her social adroitness and her husband's popularity, she had never penetrated. Reserved in the first instance for the young and active members of the House of Wittelsbach, poverty in numbers had forced them to open the gates to the embassies and legations, as well as to the older families of the Bavarian aristocracy. Ordham had been admitted to this club as a matter of course, and tennis being the only form of exercise that he tolerated, he was an expert player, and might be seen at the courts four or five times a week.

To-day, the air being charged with the elixir of spring, he was frisking about like a kitten; and the sight not only made Hélène Wass pale with fury, but induced a spasm of bitter despair. It was manifest that nothing in him but his youth, his incontrovertible youth, was sentient. What cared this buoyant healthy young Englishman for the pleasures of the intellect, for impending examinations, the momentous question of career? What cared he for LIFE, its problems, its tragic females? They were non-existent as was proper at his age, and his blood was sweeping from his heels to his head in exultant waves, his lungs were full of oxygen, and he was winning his game.

He made her feel old, forlorn, remember that whether she captured and held him or not there was one of life's gates to which she had lost the key. That belonged to other young people like himself. True, she could play tennis, and a very good game, but she could not abandon herself to it, and that was the whole point.

Then, for the first time, she lost her head. She had imposed a severe strain upon her excitable spoilt temper in disciplining herself for a week. The prospect of ten

days more, during which she must still control herself, play the rôle of the arch indulgent friend, when she was devoured by at least four different passions, abruptly declared itself beyond her powers of endurance. The game of tennis finished, she sent her footman to Ordham with an imperious summons. He came reluctantly, for he intended to play another game at once.

"Come with me!" she exclaimed below her breath. "You must! you must! The most dreadful thing has happened, and you are my only friend. I must talk to you."

Wondering what dreadful fate could menace any one so carefully and exquisitely arrayed, but recalling that he had practically engaged himself to stand by her for a fortnight, he sent the footman for his coat and entered the victoria. She waved her hand in the direction of the Englischergarten, and ten minutes later, leaving the carriage at the opening of a secluded path in the woods, she led Ordham along the romantic windings of the Isar. When they were out of earshot, she suddenly caught him by the shoulders and brought her morbid excited little face close to his.

"Johann! Johann!" she gasped. (She spoke English perfectly.) "Take me away! Fritz suspects — he threatened this morning to kill me. He has gone to Berlin. It is only a ruse! He will return suddenly, hoping to entrap me —"

"But he cannot." Ordham recalled some of her recent lies, and felt the necessity of keeping his head clear. "I will even stay away from your house. Then, what danger?"

"Oh, you don't understand! It is the knowledge of the sword that hangs over my head. If he came back suddenly and discovered nothing immediate, it would make him the more furious. He would ferret out other things."

"I don't think he could." But his blood congealed, and he wondered if it were the damp woodland after his hour of tennis. That this would be an excellent excuse for illness on the morrow cheered him somewhat, and he said with his exquisite gentle courtesy:

"I am sure that you are agitating yourself for nothing. But could we not talk it over to-morrow? I feel that I am getting a chill — I have not had a shower and rub down, you know, and this enchanting nook is rather like a new-made grave. You know how easily I take cold."

"I don't believe you ever had a cold in your life," she screamed. "In those flannels you look like a pink baby that hasn't cut its teeth. You shall listen to me, and if you write me to-morrow that you are ill I'll go to the Legation."

"Oh, for your own sake, don't do that."

"I'm beyond caring for appearances. If Fritz discovers that I love you, will he not divorce me? What matter if Munich cut me first? I know now that is what they expect Fritz to do. Some one of them has told him. My life here is rushing to a climax. It is only a question of days when I shall be cast out for every she-wolf — led by Princess Nachmeister — to set her teeth in my flesh."

Ordham, colder each moment, stared at the ground with blanching face. He recalled the discreet hint of Excellenz. And if she knew, why not others? He wondered somewhat at Munich's sudden access of virtue, then remembered its deathless intolerance of the outsider. Might it not be true that this poor woman — he had never seen any one look so weak and helpless, as she wrung her hands and stared into vacancy — was about to be publicly disgraced on his account? He turned faint and sick at the burden cast upon his unwilling shoulders, but he made up his mind to temporize until the last moment.

Her eyes dismissed their fixed stare and met his in an agony of appeal. So may martyrs have looked when beholding the torch approach the fagots.

"Ah!" she wailed softly. "If you but loved me! Then it would not matter. My villa in Italy! We could be so happy. In Italy nothing matters. And by and by all would be forgotten. You are of the elect, and to them all things are forgiven. But you hate me! You hate me!"

"How can you say such a thing? You have taken away my breath. You suggest enchanting possibilities, but

we must both take more time to think. And I really must leave this damp spot. It is dangerous for us both. If you have not come to the conclusion by to-morrow that your fears are exaggerated, we will talk it over. Shall we meet here?"

"Will you swear not to send me word that you are ill?"

"Of course."

"Then come to the house. I shall receive you in the salon. If we sit in the middle of the room no one can overhear a word we say, and did Fritz return suddenly no situation could disconcert him more. Whereas, did we meet here — and were followed — how do I not know that the footman was not told to spy? — yes! Let us go — now — quickly!"

She hastened out of the grove, but at the end of the path paused abruptly. "I must walk!" she announced. "I shall dismiss the carriage. It is better, too, that you should walk."

"Very well." He resigned himself to another tête-à-tête. The park was nearly deserted. They walked along the outer carriage drive. He endeavoured to divert her mind. He might as well have attempted to dam a flood with his hands. She had reached that pitch of nerves which must find relief in a torrent of words or in hysterics. Her maid would soon be methodically administering sedatives; and meanwhile Ordham was forced to listen to a tirade against Wass, Munich, and her thrice unhappy fate in loving a man who, for worldly reasons, would not permit himself to return her love, hesitated to fly to a Paradise in Italy lest a few ridiculous people cut him for six months. He was appalled at the strength of the woman's passion, and distracted at the thought of the possible consequences. No longer could he cheat himself with the delusion that she had transmuted her love into friendship, that she would open her net after the fashion of sensible women of the world when the captive began to flutter. For once his diplomatic instinct was at a loss. Again he felt that events were rushing too quickly for him, and he had not the least idea what to do.

Thus it happened that Margarethe Styr, seated in the curtained depths of her tower, that she might amuse herself with glimpses of the world she so seldom cared to enter, sat up suddenly and gazed hard at a voluble white reckless woman dressed like a butterfly, and a dejected young cavalier in flannels. She had heard no gossip of these two, but this vision, linked with his similar appearance when leaving the house of the same woman a few days before and his careless nod on the night of the Nachmeister concert, told the story. Countess Tann concerned herself not in the least with the affairs of others, and it is probable that if she had not met Ordham a second time, she merely would have smiled half in pity, half in scorn, at the eternal folly of young men, as manifested in this moving tableau. But she had unbent to him even at Neuschwanstein, far more on that night when he had leaped through this window to her rescue. And to no one else in eight years had she given the least of herself. That alone entitled him to a unique place in her regard; and to refrain from some degree of personal interest in so sympathetic a creature she had discovered to be impossible. Moreover, in spite of the remodelling of character effected by that strong brain and will, there was no lack of plain female in Margarethe Styr. She determined then and there, not only to save this charming young man from the toils of an unscrupulous siren, but to indulge in the pleasure of outwitting another woman. She knew enough of Hélène Wass to conclude that her life had reached a desperate climax which threatened danger to the man that had magnetized the remnant of her youth. As she rose and went upstairs to dress for supper, she felt even more stimulated than when about to engage in a round with the opera-house cabal.

XIII

STYR, THE POTTER

T was on this night that he was to sup with her. The r appointed was seven, and, not knowing his habits, dressed early. As she arrayed herself in one of the e Fedora tea-gowns that Bernhardt had made fashion-, she congratulated herself upon the inspiration that bade him, as he swung down from her window, "not dress." After that scene in the park she resolved nitely to make him understand at once that although ng alone, and an artist, about whom, no doubt, many ies were current, she was not to be confounded with cocottes of society: she could picture the costumes in ch Hélène Wass received her admirers at tête-à-tête pers! The Fedora gown, with its curved but loosely ng back, its straight panel in front that hung from throat slipper, unrevealing but by no means negligée, was the den mean betwixt the formal and the intimate in femi-e attire. And no one could carry such a garment with re dignity than Countess Tann. A number of these dora gowns had come to her recently from Paris, and selected one to-night of which all save the ivory-white el of crêpe de chine was of mignonette-green velvet. e girdle, which hung low, was composed of flexible er links and had been picked up in one of the antiquity ps of Munich. Only her beautiful throat was bare. r hair was arranged like a coronet. She had seldom t her interest in clothes, and once or twice a month tertained at supper Excellenz Nachmeister, Possart, nbach, and a number of the older authors, artists, and ientific men, who could talk, and who were content to ait her summons.

To-night she smiled at the unmistakable excitement of titivating once more for a mere man, although he made no appeal whatever to her deeper feminine instincts. Those had long been dead, and she stared down for a moment at their graves, almost forgotten under the heavy mounds of loathing and hatred for the sex for which they had been implanted. She no longer hated men; she had not even the desire, common to the woman that has been deeply wronged, to wreak vengeance upon them as a sex, now that all the cards were in her hands; art had enchained every faculty and left little room in her mind for the meaner interests of life. But she was a woman still, or she would not have been the great artist she was; and she sighed a little as she clasped her girdle, and even experienced a fleeting envy of Hélène Wass, who was two years older than herself. She was very happy, she dwelt upon serene heights, and one day Wagner would conquer London and she would sing there and behold the world at her feet. But Life, Life itself, had cheated her horribly; she must die when her time came without one tender or beautiful memory. It had gorged her with its knowledge, but its lessons had been hideous; and only her strong will — perhaps the greatest of her gifts — banished their memory when they rose and flitted, phosphorescent ghosts, across her upper consciousness. She swept them aside to-night and went downstairs, grateful that with the power to love had gone the power to suffer; for she would go out that instant from the world and its music rather than descend into those buried depths of her nature again.

Although it was ten minutes past seven her guest had not arrived, and she went into the drawing-room to wait for him. She felt some vanity in displaying her salon to one who she knew instinctively possessed a cultivated and exacting taste. It was a large room on the right of the entrance, with a row of alcoves on the garden side, each furnished to represent one of the purple flowers. The woodwork was ivory-white; the silk panels of the same shade were painted with violets or lilacs, pansies, asters, orchids, or lilies, as if reflecting the alcoves. There

was but one picture, a full-length portrait of Styr as Brynhildr, by Lenbach. The spindle-legged furniture was covered with pale brocades and not aggressively of any period. It was distinctly a "Styr Room," as her admirers, who were admitted on the first Sunday of the month, had long since agreed, while sealing it with their approval.

At half-past seven Ordham was shown in, exclaiming: "I am so sorry! But my driver went to sleep. I am positive of it. I spent the entire time between Barerstrasse and Schwabing crying '*Schnell!*'"

"They are always at least half asleep at this hour. They have reached almost the limit of their day's allowance of beer. For that matter, I often see them asleep in the park three hours earlier, huddled down into their meridians and trusting to their patient old nags to keep the road. One drove up a tree in front of my window not long since. Shall we go in to supper?"

The dining-room was across the hall, a stately little room fitted up in brown and dull gold. The small table, with its delicate service of porcelain and crystal, was perfectly appointed, and the simple supper of *omelette aux fines herbes*, pigeons, salad, and American hot breads, was so refreshing to Ordham, after the heavy English cooking of the Legation, and the heavier of such of the Bavarian aristocracy as did not employ chefs, that it diverted and comforted him. But he had looked pale and harassed when he entered, and Styr bore her purpose in mind.

They talked, as Hélène had anticipated, of Wagner, and Margarethe succeeded in interesting him deeply when she spoke of her early doubts and fears, not of the difficulties of the music, but of the strange women she must portray.

"I had never heard the rôles sung, you know," she was saying, as they entered the gallery by the river and she motioned him into the deepest of the chairs. "Please sit still. I am given to prowling. And smoke. Those are Russian cigarettes, and very good, but smoke your own, if you prefer. I had read those operas over and over,—Heavens, but how often! — imagining myself the heroine

of each in turn; but when my voice was ready for interpretation, I realized that thought — brain — as well as imagination, was a prerequisite. Of course I had not long been in Bayreuth before I heard how others interpreted them, but that conveyed little to me. As soon as I had begun really to analyze and ponder upon the characters of Brünhilde and Isolde, I chose to call them from their graves into my own soul, divested of all the conventions which already clung to them like barnacles. My ardour was so great that when roaming alone in the woods of Eremetage, the old park of the Margraves on the hill outside of the town, I really persuaded myself — and for hours at a time — that I was one or other of those great women, torn with her passions, delirious with her hopes, exalted with her despair. My God! my God! What happiness! I lived the life of the imagination, the artistic imagination on fire; I gave not a thought to my personal self. Nor was there time for anything but study. Frau Cosima, regarding me as an irresponsible genius, found me a lodging with a good creature who kept me from starving — and the clothes on my back. Perhaps even The Master laughed at my intoxication,— for it was far beyond enthusiasm,— but I neither knew nor cared. I was quite mad. Of course such a time can never come again, for I have learned all the great rôles, and who shall write others? But at least I am happy while singing them, and throughout the day preceding the night of a performance I live the part to myself. I see the Rhine beneath my window, my tower is the Hall of the Gibichungs. I hear the Atlantic in the Isar and fling myself face downward on that divan and let the passions of all womankind tear my heart as they tore Isolde's when they transformed her into a fate and the avenger of her sex."

Ordham had forgotten Hélène Wass. He would rather have made no reply, but when she paused, he took refuge, after his habit when excited, in commonplace:

"That is perhaps your greatest acting — that first act of *Tristan*. But of course there is no other in which you run the gamut of the passions — although in *Götterdämmerung* — but really I am not up to criticism. You are

terribly real in all of your tragic rôles. I wonder how real it all is — if you are capable of sweeping a man out into eternity with you to-day? You must have been once."

"I am capable of nothing but acting to-day; and of getting quite wrought up in the novelty of talking to some one besides myself in this room. I receive those I receive at all in the salon, but in this I live. Let me show it to you."

He followed her about the long room that reminded him of galleries in certain old houses in England. It must have been very bright during the day, for the side facing the river was made almost entirely of windows. The other three walls were set thick with pictures, many of them sketches laid at the feet of Die Styr by the devotees of another art; a few old prints and etchings, and an infinite number of photographs. Ordham wondered how a woman who made so few friends had managed to collect so many signed presentments, until he examined the signatures and found that they were all from celebrities or members of the royal families of Bavaria and other German states. Ludwig had sent her no less than twelve, ranging from the supreme if morbid beauty of his young manhood to the pallid corpulence of the present, in which nothing lived to remind the world of one of the most promising monarchs that ever had ascended a throne but the deathless ideality of the eyes. Other members of the royal and ducal Wittelsbachs, kindly and genuine people, who came sometimes to drink a cup of tea with the great artist (whom they admired with that true reverence for art that the centuries had bred in them) had sent their photographs handsomely framed and affectionately autographed. Ennobled though she was, the fact that she was of those that received payment for services rendered debarred her from court functions at the Residenz, but that was all. She had dined with the Queen-mother more than once, and was invited to the routs at the other palaces in common with the rest of the Bavarian aristocracy. Although that strong brain could never turn, it must have admitted an occasional wave of astonishment, perhaps

exultation, at the significance of this eccentric curve in her fortunes.

Some such thought flitted through Ordham's mind, but he made no comment, and admired the graceful crowded room in general. It looked as if the disposition of the tables and chairs were changed daily, and although the walls were of a delicate grey, there was colour somewhere, in what he could not define, so perfect was the harmony, that gave the room warmth and brightness. At one end a marble bust of Wagner stood alone on a pedestal. The books were in the tower, opposite whose arch was the divan with its many pillows.

"You should be very happy in such a room," he said with a sigh, as he returned to the deep comfort of his chair. "I can well imagine that here you can conjure up any vision you wish. I have been here but half an hour, and already it seems more like home to me than any room in Munich. I cannot fancy anything disagreeable happening in it."

"But there are so many beautiful rooms in Munich." She took a chair facing him, lit a cigarette, and prepared to draw him out.

"Beautiful, but not *gemütlich* — wonderful word! Either they are magnificent, like Princess Nachmeister's, or merely formal, with fine things in them, or quite awful, with stuffy ancestral furniture that should have been refilled seven generations ago. My room at the Legation is done up in chintz and is very pretty and fresh, but it is not — well, it does not shut out the world as this room does."

"But your place is in the world. And it is very good to you."

"Oh, sometimes."

There being no fire to stare into, his gaze had wandered to the open window near his chair. Suddenly he realized that the dark object beyond was a bit of the Englischergarten, and the scene of the afternoon flashed back to his mind. The vague sense of dissatisfaction that had stolen over him at the last words of Countess Tann crystallized, and he turned pale and drew in his breath sharply.

"Has Fräulein Lutz been scolding you? She gave me many unhappy quart d'heures."

"I can only be grateful to her — and to you."

"That was a sort of gambler's throw on my part — I am curious to see how far you will go in the diplomatic career. Very far, I venture to predict."

"Oh!" He twisted about again and looked hard at the dark panel of the window. His languid ambition gathered a sudden vehemence as he seemed to behold a forking road in his future and a sinister pointing finger.

"What is the age limit for examinations?"

"Twenty-six."

"That gives you two years. With Fräulein Lutz you cannot fail to pass in German. But I find those examinations rather stupid. It gives too many opportunities to the wrong class of young men, while those more naturally gifted for such a career are thinking only of amusing themselves. And after all, an under secretary can acquire one language after another in the capitals where he is attached long before he has any but a purely personal need of them. By the time he is a first secretary he will know at least four languages, no matter how limited his linguistic talents."

"How wonderful of you to have thought about a career so far removed from your own."

"Is it? In your case, however, I have had the benefit more than once of Princess Nachmeister's disquisitions. She has made up her mind to live to see you an ambassador; and she is quite capable of living till ninety."

"I could hardly be an ambassador at forty-four, unless I had had uncommon opportunities." But his eyes kindled and he smiled. He was easily diverted, and even though his ambition might not grow fast enough to conquer his indolence and love of pleasure before it was too late, his natural sense of dignity, and a pride both personal and racial, reminded him, now and again, that it was his duty to take the place among men to which his talents and his opportunities entitled him.

"Well — you might come back as Minister Resident to Bavaria, and cheer your good old friend's last days."

"Oh!" He had turned pale again. "I may never embark upon the diplomatic career, Countess. It — I — it is too expensive, I am afraid. It is only in the last year that I have learned the disagreeable lesson that money is not to be had for the wishing. When I chose the diplomatic career, — not, I fear, with any idea of serving my country, but as the most congenial I could think of, — I had a vague idea that money in unlimited quantities was my birthright, that it would flow in, every quarter, with the changing seasons. Intellectually, I accept the fact that I am a younger son and likely to remain one for another quarter of a century; but personally, this knowledge seems to make no impression on me whatever. I keep on spending more than my income, even here in Munich where I am a guest. How can I expect properly to maintain the position of a regular member of the staff with increasing social obligations? There is no pay at all for two years; for many it is insignificant. I scorn to be a mere hanger-on, professional diner-out. It is my disposition to entertain, to give as good as I get."

"Young men, particularly young officials, are in such demand — that need hardly worry you. And then you can marry. High Heaven has preordained that young Englishmen of great expectations and immediate debts shall capture ambitious fortunes. Your family influence must be immense. Cause yourself to be appointed to your legation in Washington — that Mecca of the worthy and impecunious young attaché. You will have married a rich, pretty, and charming girl before your first year is out. I am beginning to feel that I have the seeds of the match-maker in the débris of my feminine soul. I fancy that half the American wives in Europe were caught in their own diplomatic pond."

"I may never marry. I have little inclination for matrimony." But he spoke sadly, for the alluring vision of Mabel Cutting and her millions had risen with the advice of the Styr. "Besides — well — "

Countess Tann rose and closed the window, drawing the curtains. The room looked even more friendly, more

shut in from the world, than before. He had risen to assist her, and as she resumed her seat, he stood looking down at her. He had never liked any one so much, never felt so oddly at home, since the death of his father. Her atmosphere of mystery had vanished in this room where she lived her intimate woman's life. She was not seductive nor too fascinating, but friendly, intelligent, *gemütlich*. A wave of boyish despair swept over him. He would have liked to put his head in her lap and pour out his troubles and receive her comfort and advice. Although he looked as impassive as the Sphinx, she knew that the time had come to speak.

"You are in trouble," she said softly. "I knew it the moment you came in, and it has been rising to the surface at intervals ever since. I can only divert you for a few moments at a time. You are not in the least what you were at Neuschwanstein, and you have a great reputation in Munich for high spirits. New friends often make the best confidants. Something tells me that I can help you. Do let me if I can. I have given you more of my confidence than I have ever given to any one. It is your turn. And there is a bond — you must feel it as well as I. Indeed — I am almost superstitious about it, so — let me help you."

He sat down under this assault, but instead of sinking into the deepest embrace of the easy chair, after his habit whenever he captured that triumph of modern furnishing, he leaned forward, staring at her as if magnetized, and feeling something of the gratitude he so often politely expressed.

"You are very good! Why do you take so much interest — you, of all women? You do not dwell on the same plane with poor tormented human beings."

"But I did once! Bear that in mind, and tell me what troubles you."

"I am afraid I cannot."

"You mean that it involves a woman and that I will put two and two together and discover who she is?"

"Something like that."

"You forget that I am not of your world. I enter it on

rare occasions, as a sort of lay figure. None of its gossip comes to me. I have a few acquaintances, but they know better than to regale me with the scandal of the town. To me Munich is a mere audience."

"Princess Nachmeister seems to have talked to you a good deal about me."

"But only because of her genuine interest. She has never gossiped about you."

"I don't think there has been any gossip — no, I suppose you never could guess. I have been foolish and I am afraid I shall have to pay heavily."

"Don't believe all that unscrupulous girls — "

"Oh! oh! It is not as bad as that. Perhaps, though, it is worse, if only because more intangible. It is a sort of pressure — an accumulation — a woman fancies herself in love with me — of course she isn't, but — well — she thinks that she is willing to sacrifice everything. She has great strength of feeling, and I am haunted by the fear that she will carry me away on that current whether I will or not. I do not love her in the least, but there are obligations — "

"Were you very much in love with her? You do not look as if you had passed through the throes of the grande passion."

"I was fascinated."

"But she did the love-making? If it is what I imagine — a casual episode with some light-headed blasée society woman who is fascinated with your youth — I fail to see that you have incurred a permanent obligation."

He gave her a sharp look, but forgot that he was in the hands of a woman whom many rated as the greatest actress of her time. Her expression was speculative, disapproving; there was no canny gleam in her eyes, no undue eagerness in her manner. It was patent that she was theorizing out of her wide knowledge of the world and human nature.

"She is not old — at least in looks, — and I don't think she is blasée," he replied, driven to defend his taste. She is extraordinarily full of life, of interest in everything;

but she is high-strung and takes things too tragically. It is my misfortune that she fancies just now that I have inspired the serious passion of her life. No doubt she will soon get over it. But meanwhile!"

"Why don't you flee to England?"

"I won't run. Besides, she would follow. And — well, there *is* an obligation. I could have stopped it in the beginning — as I did later, when I had only the excuse of being bored. But I did not. That I did not take the matter seriously at any time does not alter the fact that she did — does. And that seems to give her a hold I cannot shake off."

"Ah! She appeals to your chivalry, your sympathy, pity! She is a clever woman at all events. She has played upon — Oh, I have no patience with such women. They ruin more lives than the labelled women of the streets, for they make the insidious approach. She wants to marry you, of course."

"I fancy she has some such idea, but her husband lives."

"Then she wants to run away with you first."

Ordham stood up again. The more or less vague apprehensions that had haunted him for several hours took form and substance.

"Yes," he said; "I am afraid that is it."

"Good God!" Styr stood up, her face expressing a horror that lashed his own brain. "That means ruin, no career — being a social outcast — for several valuable years, at all events. No opportunity to marry a decent girl of fortune. Nothing! And you — all the delightful freshness of your young good looks faded, your enjoyment of life dulled, embittered, — your splendid pride broken. Oh, you cannot, you do not contemplate such a step!"

"No, I don't," he said intensely, although he did not raise his voice to the tragic pitch of hers. "But she does. That is the whole point. Her husband may accuse her at any moment. I think that is what she wants. Then she will confess. He will cast her out. I must go with her. Whatever she may be, there will be no altering the fact that she will have courted ruin for my sake, and I cannot

desert her. I have been a fool. I must pay the price. How could I act otherwise?"

He looked so obstinate that Margarethe could have shaken him, but she was aghast. It was far worse than she had supposed. She was the more determined to save him — but how? She longed to be alone, to set her wits to work.

"Suppose you were to be convinced that she had had many other lovers — which, no doubt, is the case?"

"What difference would that make?"

"Well, none, I suppose, with a psychological young modern like yourself! But you are too good to throw away. This must not happen. Cannot you keep her quiet by renewed devotion and let her down by degrees?"

"I am afraid I haven't the self-command. I almost hate her — except when she appeals to my sympathies, and then I almost love her."

"If you were ten years older you would manage it all so well! But, to be sure, if you were ten years older you would not be in this predicament, for more reasons than one. I suppose that you have never in your life done anything you did not want to do, nor failed to gratify every desire?"

"When possible," he said ingenuously. "But I have to do many things I don't like."

"I fancy you would have some difficulty in enumerating them. You radiate an atmosphere of self-indulgence, and the caresses of fortune. But this! I must, I will save you! I have learned in a hard school to succeed in whatever I undertake, and I shall not fail here — "

"You will not try to find out who she is?" He did not speak excitedly, but in a very low and quiet tone.

"I do not care in the least who she is. And how could I find out? No — but you are too good — It seemed to me when I sent Lutz to you that I pledged myself to your future."

She came up to him swiftly and took both his hands. He stared at her, fascinated, for she looked stronger than any one he had ever seen. Involuntarily he leaned for-

ward a little, as if to rest on that great strength; and that moment witnessed the forging of the real bond between them. "Give me your word," she said, "that you will take no step until I have had time to think."

"Of course." And then he felt that his usual ready formula was unworthy of this woman. "I don't know," he faltered; "events might be too strong."

"Oh, I know the pressure of events! But you are not fifteen, and you are very clever. You can temporize for a week or two. Give her a chance to cool down and think better of it."

"I have put her off so often. She no longer believes one of my excuses." He spoke with some humour.

"Oh, pretend that you love her, but beg her to wait till you have passed your examinations."

"What does she care for my examinations? And if she means to marry me, she knows well enough that I cannot enter diplomacy blackened by a scandal."

"Well, find some other excuse—tell her that you are on the verge of cajoling a larger income out of your brother—and meanwhile you really must pretend that you love her more than ever—"

"I cannot!" There was such tragic disgust in his tones that Margarethe had never liked him half as well.

"I am afraid that you really hate her."

"I wish she were dead and buried!"

"And yet you are thinking of spending your ruined life with her! Oh, the folly of youth! But one might as well talk to the winds. What would become of the world if women had such extravagant notions of honour?"

Ordham, being a man, laughed at this. But he replied, "I should think that you—of all women—had a very keen sense of honour."

"Perhaps, but I don't strain the point. And I have lived long enough to leaven ideals with common sense. Well—at least promise me this—that for one week—seven whole days, mind you—you will not take a step that would ruin your life. It is not so much to ask."

"Yes—I think I can promise you that. I have a sore

throat and no doubt can develop a case of bronchitis and go to bed for a few days. Strangers always get bronchitis during their first year in Munich."

"Good!"

"But I don't see what you can do."

"Nor I; but I shall disown myself for the rest of my life if I don't think of something. Only I must have time."

He dropped her hands and moved away uneasily. She might be honourable according to her standards, but he remembered that she could look like a fate—and was supreme in the first act of *Tristan!* He doubted if, given an impulse strong enough to rouse her, she would stick at anything. But, he reflected, she was not in love with him. The vainest of men could admit no delusion on that point; Ordham had no more than his share of vanity, and had been given opportunities to decipher the danger signals he dreaded. Therefore would she do nothing rash; and he had some curiosity, although little hope, as to what she might suggest when he emerged from the refuge of his chamber.

"You are too kind," he said. "Of course I shall be only too ready to listen if you can show me a way out. May I come again soon? Ah! if I were swept away on that current, I suppose I never should see this room again."

"I do not fancy you would care to show yourself again in Munich for several years, at least. Come meanwhile as often as you can—except on the night before I sing, or on the day of a performance. I practise my vocal gymnastics before you are awake in the morning!"

XIV

THE SAVING GRACE

It was not until the gate was locked behind him that Ordham remembered that in his preoccupation he had forgotten to tell his *kutscher* to return for him. If any more harrowing climax could have been devised by a vicious fate to crown the unhappiest day of his life than a midnight walk from Schwabing to Barerstrasse — some three miles — his imagination was unable to suggest it. He detested walking at any time, and to-night his throat really was irritated, his head ached a little. Schwabing showed not a point of light; it might have been the Alpine village it so picturesquely resembled. There was a long highway between fields to traverse before reaching the Ludwigstrasse, and even there he might not pick up a cab. The stately shell of Munich and most of her contents were practically dead at ten o'clock.

A sharp wind was blowing from the Alps across the high plateau. Ordham pulled up the collar of his light overcoat and walked more briskly than was his habit. Illness might be convenient as an excuse, but as a fact was little to his taste; although he realized that it was not the worst evil that could befall him at present.

For perhaps the first time in his life something deeper than his temper was agitated. He could always stamp about in a fine rage when annoyed, but he had had little occasion to rail at a perverse fate. Now he found himself face to face with a distinct crisis in his life — the probability of disaster just beyond. He had heard Frau von Wass talk wildly before, but other women talked wildly and nothing came of it. They seemed rather to enjoy their

little dramas than otherwise. He regarded them all as interesting books — or plays — which he was graciously permitted to read at first hand. But his own attitude had always been nearly impersonal. When he had closed the book clept "Frau von Wass," he had, in the insolence and inexperience of his youth, taken for granted that it would accumulate dust in limbo with all of its kind. He had been as much astonished as annoyed at the turn affairs had taken, but not apprehensive until to-day. That Hélène Wass was in desperate earnest he could no longer flatter himself by doubting. He reviewed his own share in the incident; and while he was amazed that such a price should be levied for what had been little more than politeness on his part, still was he far too intelligent not to remind himself that men had paid as high for less, and too just not to admit that it had been in his power to nip the woman's passion in the bud.

Although he was puzzled as well as frightened at this encounter with the grim visage of life, whose gloomy unsympathetic eyes presaged defeat, he was sullenly angry with himself. If he had loved the woman or even been possessed, no matter how briefly, by one of those overwhelming passions of which he was always reading and hearing, he felt that he would have accepted the consequences without flinching. But as it was, he felt like a foolish mariner who had gone to sea without a compass and found himself justly on the rocks. Unless the unexpected happened, it looked as if he would be swept out of Munich with the rest of the Frau Geheimrath's wreckage and landed high and dry in Italy.

Suddenly another ugly phase of this crisis in his life leapt to his mind, and he passed through the arch of the Siegesthor with such a stride that the British Minister, returning from a late card party, did not recognize him and went on without offering the hospitality of his coupé.

Normally there was a faint hope that Bridgminster would once more pay his debts, those distressing tradesmen's bills of which he was reminded daily. His tailor's was but one, and the aggregate must be close upon a thousand pounds.

But if he openly committed the sin with which his austere brother had the least sympathy, he would be driven into the bankruptcy court. That would be a disgrace which would blast his self-respect to the roots, even did England, never lenient to this offence, forget it in time. There is a secret tendency in most human hearts to forgive a lover his worst transgressions, but no sympathy whatever for the financial muddler. And such a thing was unheard of in his family, whatever its lapse in other directions. It was bred in his very marrow to shrink with fastidious disgust from any form of monetary publicity. To owe money to tradespeople did not worry him in the least so long as they were sensible and patient, but there was ineffable disgrace in being blazoned to the world as a man hopelessly in debt.

It was at this agonizing point in his reflections that his attention was attracted by the peculiar antics of a dog emerging from the Schellingstrasse. It had dropped something and was howling, grovelling in evident appeal at the feet of a woman who soundly berated it. The woman stamped her huge foot and pointed to the object the dog had dropped. Howling and yelping an almost human protest, the dog picked up the object and ran past Ordham into the Ludwigstrasse, then discarded his burden once more, sat down on his haunches, and lifted up his voice in a series of cries that sounded like an appeal to the winking stars.

Ordham, his curiosity excited, went forward, and bending down, examined the object of the dog's aversion. It was a block of ice. The poor beast was howling with a toothache. Ordham looked at the woman as much in amazement as in anger. She could have carried the ice in her skirt; it was inconceivable to him that any one could maltreat a dog. But as he opened his mouth to relieve his indignation, he realized that any attempt to penetrate the thick Bavarian skull with his inadequate German would be a mere waste of time. He picked up the piece of ice and dropped it into the pocket of his overcoat.

"If you will lead the way," he said, "I will carry it for you."

The astonished housewife stared in amazement, ejaculated

"Ach Gott!" then, with a laugh of deep good-natured co tempt, led off with a swing that exhibited the tops of h man's boots, the red blanket petticoat above them, and th full flounces of her pantalets. She was almost as broad a long, her waist line being in no place distinguishable fro the solid expanses above and below. Her skirts were shor she wore a shawl crossed over her upper amplitudes an pinned behind. A small Tyrolean hat sat jauntily abo a walnut of plastered hair. She was a street sweepe inured to every sort of hardship, and not likely to sympathiz with a dog's aching teeth. But no doubt she fed him a well as she could afford.

The strange procession made its way up the stately Lu wigstrasse, deserted but for the sentries before a palac Once or twice Ordham, contemplating his guide, wh swung like a vast pendulum, laughed silently. The grat ful dog flew up and down, or frisked about his heels in a ecstasy of relief. At the Odeonsplatz were two belate cabs. Ordham handed into one the woman, the dog, an the ice, paid the driver, and sank into the other with a sig of gratitude, not only for the more familiar mode of loc motion, but for the temporary diversion afforded by a do with a toothache! For a few moments he had forgotte his bills and Frau von Wass. When he reached th Legation his throat was very sore, and fortune so fa favoured him that on the following day he really was laid u with bronchitis. His servant took a verbal message to th Frau Geheimrath, which, after sharp questioning, she wa forced to accept.

XV

POTTERS CONFER

On this same morning there was a brief but pithy interview between Styr and Excellenz in the very centre of the Nachmeister gardens.

"So! so!" exclaimed the old woman; her grey eyes glittered like ice, the corners of her mouth were down, of her nose up. "It comes to this! Poor Fritz! We can save the young man if we are quick enough, but what of my poor old friend? . . . Ach, yes! You are not interested. He is old. You — yourself — look full of insolent youth this morning. I have never seen you in this mood. Cultivate it. You look twenty-eight. Myself, were I your age, should prefer to look more like a woman than a goddess. Also! Fritz must suffer in any case, so all we can do is to save the young man and spare the old one a lesion. Fritz is the vainest man in Germany or he would have found her out long since. He remains in Berlin ten days. You think she intends to make Mr. Ordham elope with her before his return. I wonder! Gott! I fancy it would take more than ten days to work our young friend up to that heroic pitch. More likely she has planned a coup of some sort. Otherwise — I doubt. He will politely promise to meet her at the train. At the last moment he will send a message — but in haste! 'I am so sorry! I can't go to-day. I have a cold.' I know all the ingenious devices of that charming youth, and so, I doubt not, does Frau Hélène. He has not eaten of the big black cake of life yet, merely nibbled at its edges."

"He is likely to choke on a slice unless we are quick enough."

"True. Also! I repeat, she must know all his little ways by this time, have discovered that he is by no means as ingenuous as he looks, nor as easy to manage. She moves and lives in a network, a very maze, of intrigue. Only the devious ways appeal to her. You may be sure she has some plot on foot which the sudden departure of Fritz disarranged. That would account for her excitement that same afternoon. I have watched this little drama from the first, but she seems to have been playing a deeper game than I fancied — and different! I have watched many of her little dramas in the last twenty years. Of late it would seem that she had been lulling the suspicions of our young friend while she laid her wires. But what and where are those wires? There is only one way to find out and that is through her maid."

"I thought of that, of course; but none of my servants know any of the Wass household."

"Nor mine, probably. But I do my scheming through no such dangerous channels. The secret police is always at my service. By to-morrow night I shall have had an interview with the woman. If she has anything to reveal I shall extract it with the promise of a position in the Residenz; that is a bribe more potent than gold — which we will not use unless we must. As soon as I am in possession of the facts I shall act — you say he has vowed to do nothing rash for a week?"

"To be ill, if necessary. Fortunately she cannot storm the Legation."

"Even so, we must act quickly. If the woman is really desperate, she will find some way to compromise him — and what more effective than a violent scene in the British Legation? It would be all over Munich in an hour. But, by all the saints," Nachmeister crossed herself devoutly, "that scene she shall never make. We will baffle her before she has quite lost her patience."

When Excellenz had bidden good-by to her guest she stood for a moment regarding the path with drawn brows. Had she engaged upon an enterprise to deliver the lamb from the panther to the tigress? In a moment she shook

her head. She was a very wise old woman, and she recalled that Styr had made no apologies, no explanations. She had said nothing about disinterested friendship, taking a natural interest in a man so much younger than herself. Nachmeister had long outlived the folly of generalizing, of assuming that the same set of motives must govern the most diverse individuals. For the present, at least, Ordham was in no danger from the prima donna, who, no doubt, had lived her life, and would hardly waste her time playing upon the weakness of young men.

"But if I should be mistaken," she thought grimly, "she too can be circumvented. Ordham must marry Mabel Cutting."

XVI

THE IVORY TOWER OF STYR

Two days later Styr stood in the tower of her living room, awaiting Excellenz, who had sent her a succession of hasty notes. As always, when the river was full, she had the sensation of floating on the current of the lovely light green waters. The birds were singing in her garden and in the deep glades of the park. The Isar itself sang of the glaciers and snow peaks that gave it birth. From the fields, beyond the heavy trees, came the dainty uplifting scent of newly mown hay. Usually this scene of sylvan isolation fed the poetry of her secret life, and in these morning hours, when the park was deserted, she might people it with satyrs and dryads, even with Valkyrs, if she wished. But to-day it seemed only the romantic annex to the exciting drama into which she had precipitated herself; and it required but a slight effort to conjure up the gorgeously dressed little butterfly with her ugly old soul in her desperate face, and the perplexed, doubtless terrified, young man, dragging his feet beside her.

Styr was by no means in a philosophic frame of mind. She fully realized that this license in which she had indulged for the first time in many years, this luxury of active interest in a human being, other than a student or a chorus girl in distress, would lead far — unless she promptly locked the gates again. Already her brain was showing a disposition to offer hospitality to more than one of the great interests with which the world palpitated. Yesterday she had been on the point of buying a newspaper. If Ordham continued to call, they would inevitably discuss all interests under the sun; books alone would never

occupy them; one by one the atrophies in her uncommonly complete nature would disintegrate, disappear. And she had lived the inner life so completely, so jealously, almost as isolated in her villa by the Isar as had it been one of those schlosses on its lonely peak that decorate the German landscape! That sense of unviolated liberty! It had at times lifted her spirit to that exalted pitch to which music raises the emotional capacity of speech. There are more forms of happiness than one in this world, and Margarethe Styr had solved the greatest problem of woman's existence: she was quite happy, and not because she had found the man of her heart, but because she had eliminated man from her existence altogether. Whether Nature, that inexorable slave-driver, would have permitted her to dwell in peace with art and her soul had not circumstances first made all men hateful to her, was beside the question. But although she had found happiness, it was at the expense of far more than the one dream to which most women cling until the last of their days. She had denied her mind much that it naturally craved, and she had suppressed those superficial frivolous instincts which have their own appetites. She often longed to dress (and show herself), in marvellous Paris frocks, and, never before having known women with whom she cared to associate (save briefly on Atlantic steamers), she would have derived much honest enjoyment from long gossips with these friendly sophisticated women of Munich; she would have liked to know and discuss all the little comedies, tragedies, diverting weaknesses, in the lives of her new compatriots. But she had not dared, and the results she had achieved by her fidelity to the life long since prescribed by her too enlightened brain, encouraged her to persist. She half resolved that, having done her obvious duty by a fellow-creature, she would withdraw from further intercourse with him at once. Better snap this link while her surfaces were merely rippled, not drift on until all that was feminine in her was caught in the net of the world again, and this ideal existence destroyed.

It was at this point in her meditations that Princess Nach-

meister was shown into the gallery, and she went hastily through the arch to meet her.

"What a picture!" exclaimed Excellenz politely, although, indeed, she had long since reached the age when she could candidly enjoy feminine loveliness. "Fancy being able to wear unrelieved white in the morning! How do you like my new Paris frock? My maid says that the overskirt has too many pleats on the hips, but for my bones, I think not."

Princess Nachmeister looked very smart in a costume of dark brown camel's-hair and silk and a little bonnet of brown leaves, but Countess Tann gave it but a perfunctory glance, and Excellenz herself was too excited to demand more.

"Fritz arrives to-night and comes directly to me!" she announced. "I telegraphed yesterday afternoon that I must see him at once upon a business so important that he was not to waste time imagining it, but to come. He replied that he would leave Berlin this morning. Lotte made a sworn statement, and has obtained leave to visit her sick mother for two days in order to be out of the way of Hélène's claws when the bolt falls. She is locked up in my house; but I do not wish her to see Fritz, lest his questions should lead to other revelations that would induce even him to sue for a divorce. And that would leave Hélène free to practise on the susceptibilities of our *jüngling*. No, I shall convince him — and present the subject in such a way that he may escape apoplexy. Three days hence Frau Hélène will be locked up in that castle in Hungary in good old mediæval style. I know my Fritz. His heart will never trouble him again until it develops fatty degeneration; but in his outraged vanity he will roar like a bull, he will be vicious, relentless, and in the confusion of his mind will follow blindly every suggestion I make. How he will hate her, and how he will make her pay! He will give out that he retires to Hungary for his health, taking, of course, his dutiful wife. Later, official matters recall him, but the Frau Geheimrath is afflicted with a goitre and desires to remain in seclusion. The season over, nobody thinks of her in any case. Oh, La Belle Hélène is

disposed of, and our charming young friend is free to get himself into another scrape."

"Not for some time, I fancy. He has had his lesson and is by no means a human caldron. He will not suspect that she has been shut up on his account. A young Englishman's chivalry must be reckoned with —"

"Whatever he may suspect, he will discover nothing. Fritz will whisk her out of Munich to-night. From Hungary he will compel her to write Ordham a commonplace letter that will set him quite free."

"Heavens, how old-fashioned and romantic you still are over here! The United States might be on another planet. But there is law for women in Europe. Will she not appeal to it? She has money of her own. Will she not escape from his castle and flee to her villa in Italy?"

"In theory, but not in fact. Fritz will not be made ridiculous in the eyes of Europe, no, not if he has to pour hot lead into her ear. But a threat of extinction and the hope of his speedy demise will keep her quiet, to say nothing of the fact that she will never escape from that castle. It is in the mountains near the Roumanian border. His servants are the wild creatures of that region, and will obey their master, not only because he is their master, but a mighty sportsman, and they revere that. I have visited there. What a romantic spot for a honeymoon! But as a prison — Ach Gott! She will never even get a letter out. When she has calmed down she will affect compliance, and take care of her complexion till Fritz dies. Then she will run to Paris, where she will be very smart and very wicked until she is fifty, when she will take to opium, religion, or roulette — all three, no doubt. But ach, dear Gräfin, what a tableau we shall miss in imagination! I could regret it, for I had every detail from Lotte. Mr. Ordham, with blank rigid face supporting the hysterical Hélène in the Pompadour boudoir, bored, vaguely apprehensive. Enter Lotte, followed by Fritz in his dressing-gown and nightcap. I am convinced he wears a mustard-yellow flannel dressing-gown like the one in which Salvini strangles Desdemona! Behind them the other servants, that the matter cannot be

hushed up. It was a clever and a dramatic plot! It is almost a pity that it should not make its chapter in the unwritten history of society. And Gott! Gott! Fancy being still able to love like that! It makes one almost envious. It is the last love that makes a fool of the woman, and the first love that makes a man look as foolish as he is."

"I suppose something interesting is happening every moment in your world?" said Styr, somewhat wistfully.

"All those little dramas are more or less alike. Only you are original, dear Gräfin, and do, for the sake of this tired old brain, remain so. If ever you succumb to your sex, I shall curse you. You are a great artist in histrionics, but I am a little artist in Life, and quite as exacting. Pay me fifty marks. I had to give that voracious Lotte a hundred, besides the promise of a position in the Residenz."

XVII

ROMANTIC MUNICH

For two days Ordham was really ill, or at least so uncomfortable that his mind was quite averted from his evil fortunes. But with the quick submission of his ailment to treatment alarm bells began to ring in his brain once more. He wasted no time, however, cursing fate and his folly, neither did he make any effort to consign their achievements to one of those water-tight compartments of which he was so proud. He set his wits to work and finally hit upon a compromise which promised to save both his honour and his credit. Immediately upon his recovery he would go to England, and by hook or crook get his debts paid. He would appeal to Bridgminster first; finding him obdurate, he would confide his predicament to his mother, and he well knew that to avert a scandal she would raise the money if she had to sell her jewels or beg of her relatives. Meanwhile he should have written to Frau von Wass, very formally, — when had he ever written to her otherwise?— assuring her that he should return to Munich within the month. If she followed him, she could be kept out of sight in London. Otherwise, he might venture to hope that before his return her common sense would have revived. If not, he supposed he should be an ass, as other men had been before him; but while his chances for the diplomatic career would be ruined, his credit would be immaculate in the eyes of his world, and that would almost console him.

As it was prudent to receive no visitors and as he was in no mood for the fiction of other minds, he arrayed one of his tables with certain books presented to him by his

father long since, and whose contents he must master before presenting himself before the Civil Service Commission: histories of Europe, Asia, and America covering the period between 1789 and 1880; Blackstone's *Commentaries*, Ker's edition, 1862; Hallam's *Constitutional History of England;* Mill's *Political Economy;* Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Before now, when ill or annoyed, he had taken refuge in this austere masonry, and had found its fascinations quite as powerful for the time as the jewelled streets of literature where the creative minds displayed their wares. Sometimes, too, he read them when mortified with the knowledge that he had not "played up," "risen to the occasion," as an older man still gambling with edged tools would have done; a manifestation of the quickness and assimilative qualities of his intellect salved his wounded vanity and induced a temporary scorn of youthful follies. But, truth to tell, it is not likely that he would have opened one of these books for ten years to come could he have passed his examinations without their aid.

During the six days of his convalescence he read steadily, and if the severe diet did not elevate his spirits, it diverted his mind. From the third day of his incarceration he wrote Frau von Wass a series of pleasant little notes to keep her quiet, and, receiving no answer, inferred that she was sulking. As she crossed her letters (she never wrote him notes), he was thankful for the additional respite until the eighth day of his seclusion; then he began to feel uneasy and to wonder if she really meditated an attack on the Legation. He was on the point of cutting his convalescence short and hastening to London, when he was astounded to receive the following note from Hungary:

"DEAR MR. ORDHAM: The most dreadful thing has happened to me! I am threatened with a goitre!! I spent a part of last summer in the Bavarian Alps — I remember certain villages where every other person had one — and the young men on Sundays with their arm round the waist of some hideous disfigured girl, as if that awful growth were a sort of heirloom! The sight made me quite ill; and now I — who am always so particular about water — I am in the wildest rage with myself for being so careless. The doctors say that it will yield to treatment, but meanwhile I prefer to keep out of sight. And you were

to dine with me next week! Please don't think me rude. One of these days you will visit Munich again and then I shall give a great dinner in your honour.

"Yours sincerely,

"HÉLÈNE V. WASS."

Then for the first time did Ordham fairly appreciate the load that had weighed his spirits to earth, delaying his recovery, driving him to pound his brain into a state of stupefaction before night. In a moment he felt entirely well. Flinging his dressing-gown off and Blackstone into a corner, he began to dress hastily that he might go out of doors, take a drive, call on Countess Tann. He even felt an affectionate impulse toward Princess Nachmeister and other friends that had given much and asked little. He whistled, wondering that he had ever lost faith in his star; he felt young, — "but young!" as these foreigners would say, gay, insolent. His imagination took leaps and bounds: he saw himself an ambassador; Bridg long since retired from a world in which he had no place, leaving behind him an income which delivered his illustrious heir from the fatiguing obligation of marrying one; returning to Munich every year to hear Styr sing, and to sit for hours in that delightful gallery — no doubt in time she would let him lie on the divan while she sat in that odd American rocking-chair looking like a friendly goddess —

But his jubilance came to a violent halt. His mind had tossed up mechanically her avowed intention to save him. He had not given it a second thought, so manifest was her inability to play any part in this intensely personal crisis of his life. He recalled her eager insistence that he grant her a week, the strength that had pulled him toward her like a magnet, remembered that she had attempted greater things than foiling a silly woman and failed in none of them.

The blood mounted to his hair, he pressed his lips together until their soft boyish curves were obliterated. A wave of shame, anger, rebellion, rose and choked him.

In a few moments it receded, left him quite cold. He *was a wise young man, in* spite of follies. Whatever had

been done — assuming that vivacious note from Hungary to have been written under coercion — had been carried to a finish. The episode was over. Frau von Wass announced that fact herself. If mystery were here, it were a mystery best unsolved. A water-tight compartment opened, closed. He refused even to harbour a natural curiosity.

He returned to the pleasant occupation of arraying himself, one in which he still took as much pleasure as any girl. Hines, his man, was ill, but he was too happy to resent the trifling exertion involved in a lonely toilet. It was a brilliant morning in late spring and he selected socks, necktie, and handkerchief of a delicate sage green, and a dull grey suit cut in a fashion that often tempted even the officers to turn and look at him. Much to his chagrin, no part of his morning was ever wasted at the barber's. When he played tennis he exposed an arm with a proper filamentous surface, and on the top of his head his hair, a light burnished brown, grew as thickly as sprouting corn; but never a blade had appeared on his face. For this he should have been grateful, as his chief claim to regular beauty was the perfect oval of his face and the clean yet rounded outline of the long jaw; but he yearned for a beard to shave as a girl yearns for her first adorer to maltreat.

He finished his toilet in the course of time, sauntered out of the Legation, and, entering the cab that had awaited him forty minutes, concluded to drive for an hour, as it was too early to call. The *kutscher*, whose vast expanse looked as if about to burst through its rusty old livery, hunched down into himself after the fashion of his kind, and, with his high battered hat tilted on one side of his red face, his eyes half closed, and apparently in momentary danger of rolling from his perch, gave the Munich *droschke* that final touch of style which is the despair of Paris and Berlin.

But he drove his fare safely and slowly about a city, which after a week's tormented seclusion seemed quite the most beautiful in the world. The stately Renais-

sance capital with its Gothic corners; its old palaces and modern public buildings, the former severe, the new ornate but dignified and magnificent: its churches representing the vagaries of all architectures; its oblongs and squares of green, set with statues of public men and gushing fountains — torrents of sparkling water as free and crystal as Alpine torrents; its classic Königplatz, as severe and beautiful as Rome in the days of the Cæsars; its superb statues to the Bavarian rulers that had transformed a mediæval stronghold into the most artistic city in Europe; its innumerable terraces for beer drinking and coffee; its winding river of many branches and massive bridges, poetical name, and strange colour like melted ice reflecting pale green jewels; and then the fields and woods, the stately drives and winding ways, of the Englischergarten, where naught of Munich save its irregular but fine and soaring sky-line can be seen, — all go to the making of a city whose like is to be found nowhere on earth, and in which one can linger longest alone.

The Ludwigstrasse, one of the most imposing streets in Europe, lined from end to end with the high flat façades of the Italian Renaissance, starts from the Feldherrnhalle, a copy of the famous Loggia in Florence, and terminates far down in the perspective with the Siegesthor, a triumphal arch in the fashion of Constantine's, but surmounted by a colossal "Bavaria" driving her lions in the direction of Prussia!

As Ordham's cab turned into this street to-day, he found it crowded with people, for it was one of those saints' days, so numerous in the Bavarian calendar, when every Münchener closes his shop, and, if the weather be fine, walks the streets and fills the churches and cafés with his brood. The students too were celebrating, either the saint or some private deity of their own, for open *fiakers* were full of them: blue caps, green caps, red caps, according to their clubs, but all with the same slashed faces, the same supreme approval of themselves and the institution of universities, which gave so many of them their only chance in life to play. Here and there among the throng

were the more impressive figures of officials in brass headgear and gala uniform, white or the dazzling light Bavarian blue. Royal blue carriages, with coachmen and footmen in blue and white livery, were leaving the Residenz gardens, evidently bound for a family reunion at another palace. Everywhere was life, movement, gayety, except, to be sure, in the figures of the sentries standing before the palaces. These were as wooden as only a German soldier on duty can be, but, although they looked as stupid as no doubt they were, their eyes followed the throng.

Overhead, in the rich blue sky (the royal shade!) hung those low soft foam-white masses of clouds composed by Nature for Bavaria alone; the air was warm and light; not a breeze brought down the chill of Alpine snows; although from highest windows the sharp tumbling crowded peaks might be seen glittering through the haze that promised fine weather.

Ordham, as happy as if care had never approached him, lounged in the corner of his uncomfortable *droschke* and wondered why people went to Italy: here there was so much of Italy, so much more besides. The old Saxon at the base of his centuplicated self always stirred amiably at the sight of the good-natured German crowd (unless it jostled him), and nowhere was that crowd so good-natured as in Bavaria. It was too accustomed to its liberal allowance of daily beer ever to overdrink or crave the excitement of spirits; and although the students occasionally took pride in spurring on their seasoned constitutions to a point which enabled them to sing in the streets all night, even they found it too much of an effort, and transgressed but seldom. It is only the American student in these German universities and art schools who, unfamiliar in his home with alcohol in any form, often becomes a sot; and is a despicable object to behold, where the European is merely absurd.

There was scarcely a factory in the neighbourhood of Munich, little business outside of its shops, which opened late and closed early, no poverty, a prevailing belief that life was made to enjoy, not to take with the fatiguing

seriousness of northern climes. The Bavarian understands Italy far better than he will ever understand Prussia.

Ordham, driving slowly through this slowly moving, smiling throng, bent only upon innocent enjoyment, wondered a little that it should practically be the first to welcome all that was distempered in the arts of literature, music, painting, and the drama (those temporary but recurring aberrations, which, in the present instance, were ripening to produce the gifted but dislocated brains of Richard Strauss, Wedekind, and the ultra Secessionists). A people that were happy and simple by nature, yet capable of appreciating Wagner when encouraged by their King, might be expected to turn from this sufficient intoxication of their mental senses to the relief of plays and romances that were either serious in the good old style or merely frolicsome. But the plays presented in the theatres of Munich were enough to make Paris nervously try on her bays; and the greater and more accomplished city had never dreamed of exhibiting in the shop windows of her fashionable streets covers of books so ingenuously shameless. To shock a Münchener, the most domesticated, virtuous, bourgeois, must always have been as difficult as to persuade some Americans that human nature is made up of inconsistencies; but Ordham, at least, had never been more interested in watching the stolid children at a Spanish bull-fight, than these good, homely, soft-waisted people of Bavaria relishing the indecencies of their stage, their expression much the same as when they sat with their elbows on a table in a restaurant and devoured a dinner lasting two hours without raising their eyes. That the lower class of Bavaria was one of the most unmoral in the world, the percentage of illegitimacy being inordinately high, was beside the question, as this was not the class that filled the theatres and bought the paper-covered novels. It was not even the court society that kept the theatres open, for social diversions were many, even if no longer as brilliant as formerly: the theatres then as now were filled night after night with the phlegmatic exemplary

bourgeoisie, all of whom ambled home at the end of a performance designed to spare what imaginations they possessed, supped on sausage, black bread, and beer, and snored in stuffy ugly rooms without a dream.

Perhaps this echo of domestic rhythm explains all.

But Ordham soon dismissed the shortcomings of a city he hoped to revisit many times in the course of his life. A crowd of peasants trooped through the Siegesthor, which he was leisurely approaching on his way to the villa of Countess Tann. They had come down from their village in the Bavarian Alps to assist in the festivities of Schwabing, and were now bound for one of the humbler cafés of the city. They were in gala attire; the women homely, shapeless, sunburnt, their plastered hair surmounted by a flat round hat that looked like a lid, and probably represented Fashion making her first essay in headgear; the thick full skirt swayed as if hooped, its ugliness offset, however, by the short-waisted white bodice over which was laced a silk or velvet corselet, much decorated with silver chains, buttons, brooches, filigree, and seed pearls. The short skirts revealed large flat feet made conspicuous by their proud owners with white open-work stockings, and low shoes fitted with tassels, bows, and silver buckles. The men were straighter, better set up, improved by their coats of tan. They wore short black leather trousers embroidered with green, lively waistcoats, white shirts, black velvet jackets embroidered with green, and almost as much silver as the women. Their thick knitted stockings of grey and green exposed both knee and ankle, and all wore the little green Alpine hat with its eagle's feather, and smoked a pipe a yard long with a painted bowl. On the whole they were vastly more attractive than the average young Münchener with his high collar, red face, tight and ill-cut Sunday clothes.

Suddenly, far down the Leopoldstrasse, which continues the Ludwigstrasse beyond the arch, appeared a cloud of dust. From it emerged mounted police. They galloped down the highway, waving the crowds to the pavements, the vehicles to the very curbs. This could mean but one

phenomenon, and although Ordham coloured with annoyance at being swept aside with the rabble, he stood up in his cab to obtain a better view. A moment later, escorted by a cavalry guard in brilliant uniforms, a carriage became visible, its six horses galloping as if pursued by the furies of hell. Ordham held his breath, expecting an accident in the tunnel of the Siegesthor, but the carriage shot through without swerving a hair's breadth ; and as Ludwig stood suddenly upright, all that vast concourse, that now so rarely saw their King, set up a shout that made even the old cab horses start and paw the ground.

"Heil! Heil! Unserem König, Heil! Hoch Ludwig! Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!"

A flush rose to the heavy pallid face of the King, and his beautiful restless eyes sparkled, he smiled graciously. But he was always the conscious actor, and as the carriage flew up the street, as if the horses indeed were winged, he stood with his arms folded, his head high, as if already on a pedestal instead of in a bounding vehicle. Little wonder the Bavarians adored a monarch ever able to furnish them with impromptu theatricals. They cheered and yelled, waved hats, parasols, and handkerchiefs, until the Englishman felt the blood racing in his own veins. No doubt it raced in the King's. The hearts of the Bavarians never wavered in their loyalty to this romanticist, who to the last had something of the immortal gods in his make-up. Had he shown himself spectacularly during those fatal days when arrest impended, but while escape from Neuschwanstein was still possible, his capital would have flocked to his standard and intimidated the ministry. But Ludwig had cultivated the tragic attitude too long.

The King vanished almost as quickly as he had come. Ordham's cab ambled on its way : through the Siegesthor, along the still half-rustic Leopoldstrasse, and into the village of Schwabing. Here the narrow zigzag streets, the rural lanes, the riverside, the little beer gardens, were as thronged as the city, while opposite, in the Englischergarten, there were glimpses of another crowd which completed the impression that every house in Munich must be deserted.

Few villages in the high Alps are more picturesque than Schwabing, which still has its old mill, and the tower of whose white church, perched high, swells into one of those graceful spheres that form links in an invisible chain through the blue of Bavaria, Austria, and Hungary to the land of the Turk. About the church were many graves; and a few old women in black, hatless, bent, were praying there.

XVIII

THE SYSTEM'S FLOWER

COUNTESS TANN'S house faced a street so narrow that had not her walls been high and her opposite neighbour's abode humble she would have been forced to keep her curtains drawn. It was on the very edge of the village, and her garden extended along the highway beyond. There were few flowers in the garden, for Bavaria is not the land of flowers, but there were many trees; and wide gates at the back could be rolled apart to frame a picture of the Isar and the Englischergarten.

The front gate was of wrought iron and afforded glimpses of the secluded little park and of the villa's ornate façade. Ordham rang the bell several times before the old butler sauntered out, half asleep, and informed the impatient visitor that the Frau Gräfin was driving, but had left instructions to admit Mein Herr, should he call and be disposed to wait.

Ordham sent his *kutscher* to a near-by beer garden and followed the servant to the gallery. He declined coffee until the return of the hostess, and old Kurt opened a box of cigarettes and departed to ponder upon the marvel of a young man in the house. The maids were gallivanting or there would have been high discussion.

Ordham realized that he was a little tired, but before making himself comfortable with a book, strolled into the tower to listen for a moment to the band playing in the pagoda of the Englischergarten, and picture the numberless tables, amongst which trudged unceasingly big perspiring Bavarian maidens, carrying mugs of foaming beer to an ever thirsty people. But his eye was immediately

attracted to the books on the shelves which covered the walls of the tower, and he scanned them eagerly. He was astonished to find that the collection was almost wholly scientific. Bastian, David Strauss, Johannes Müller, Virchow, Descartes, Goethe, Baer, Lamarck, Paul Holbach, Du Bois-Reymond, Harvey, Heinrich Hertz, Bacon, Aristotle, Darwin, Spencer, Alexander Humboldt, the Vogts, Lavoisier, Spinoza, Cuvier, were a few of the names in this catholic assemblage, which had its representative in every branch of science, using the word in its broad sense. Ordham ceased to wonder that the great Styr had been able to extinguish her merely feminine ego. With such meat for daily sustenance, and the strong wine of art, the wonder was that she had not developed into a new species. The only works of fiction were the novels of Balzac, Gautier, Flaubert, and *On the Heights*. Other shelves were filled with volumes devoted to the analysis of music and the lives and letters of composers.

He returned to the gallery with a volume of *Illusions Perdues*, and looked longingly at the divan, but compromised upon the deepest of the chairs. He would have liked to smoke, but he was far too formal both by nature and training to make himself at home at this early stage of his acquaintance with Countess Tann. His eyes roved over the gallery with much curiosity. It was the first time he had known a woman that worked for her living, and he appreciated that this room, full of beautiful and interesting objects as it was, had an entirely different atmosphere from the boudoirs of the fine ladies of the world. There was a certain austerity about it, rather an absence of the luxury, frivolity, soft magnificence, of the personal nests of women that neither knew nor cared how their wants were gratified. Even the carved old chairs looked comfortable, but it was not the room of a woman who lounged, but who worked, studied, thought. To Ordham it was more personal than any woman's room he had ever seen; then he suddenly realized that it was its component of masculinity which had enveloped him at once like an emanation from his own spirit.

Half an hour later he opened his eyes to behold a tall figure in a long grey cloak smiling before him. He rose with a deep blush and stammered apologies. "Is it possible — will you ever forgive me?"

"Why not, Herr Invalide? I will go and change my frock, and then we will have coffee. Just a moment."

She reached the door, then, as if suddenly assailed by an anxious memory, turned and said hesitatingly: "I have felt so worried — it was such a relief to hear that you were really ill — and to-day you look so much less careworn, almost happy — "

"I am quite happy — thanks so much. Please don't bother — how good of you! The lady thought better of it, as I might have known she would, — has thrown me over, in fact."

"Delightful! I was at my wit's end. Now we shall keep you in Munich. Do sit down again."

She returned dressed in a white organdie frock sprigged with violets. It was flounced and full, the bodice crossed by a Marie Antoinette fichu tied loosely at the back, and in her hair she had twisted a lavender ribbon. She looked as if she had merely adapted herself to the warm afternoon, not in the least coquettish or alluring. How could she, thought Ordham, with that library behind her?

"Such a drive as I have taken!" she exclaimed as she seated herself before the coffee service old Kurt had brought in. "Down into the Isarthal and far beyond Castle Grünwald. It was delightful in the woods, or would have been without the crowds. You will go there with me some day, I hope?"

"I will go with you anywhere."

"That would mean long walks instead of sleeping until nine o'clock — eleven, I am told, it used to be."

"But everybody will be leaving Munich soon and I shall not be sitting up so late. Do take me with you — at any hour."

"But you will be following — not? They will all ask you to visit them. Poor German!"

He hesitated. "Shall you stay here?"

"I seldom go away except for a few days at a time, for I no longer sing in Bayreuth; Frau Cosima and I do not agree on the subject of Brünhilde, whom I interpret for myself. Moreover the King has often private representations in the Hof. It is as well, for I am never so happy as in Munich, and Bayreuth is not the same to me now that The Master is gone. Late in August and in September I must go on my *Gastspiel* — concert engagements in several German cities and in Vienna — but that is all; I never visit."

"I think I should remain here all summer and study with Fräulein Lutz. I should like to pass my examinations this year. But perhaps Fräulein Lutz takes a vacation?"

"I will see that she does not. Yes — stay and study. It is so fatally easy when one is young and heedless to be caught in the maelstrom of insignificance; and two years — what are they? You have the rest of your life to visit country houses."

"You have a way of phrasing truths that makes it quite impossible to forget them." He spoke dryly, but his face had flushed. "'Caught in the maelstrom of insignificance.' I shall stay here and alternate the delights of Adam Smith with Fräulein Lutz, burn my candle over Blackstone and Hallam, when I might be sneezing in some draughty castle or accumulating typhoid germs. That is to say, if you will let me walk with you — and come here often. My virtues, at least, need admiration and encouragement. May I?"

Styr had made up her mind: having delivered him from wreck, she would lead him to the threshold of his future, then return to her solitudes, pluming herself upon her successful rôle of a kindly fate in the life of a fellow-mortal so much more interesting than the musical fledglings that came to her for advice and help. For a few months she would indulge herself in the luxury and novelty of a friendship, give her mind a companion; later on, vary her isolation with a permanent interest in the career of another. She made no doubt that were Ordham carried safely over this critical interval there was a reasonable chance of his attaining a high and useful eminence. It was a strange rôle for

her to be contemplating, that of becoming a deliberate factor in the life of a man with no thought save his own good; but the more she had meditated upon it the more irresistibly had it appealed to her. She was honest enough, however, to admit that had she not liked him so thoroughly her philanthropic tendencies might have slept on undiscovered.

"I will strike a bargain with you," she said. "If you will promise not to leave town except from Saturday noon until Sunday night, and take a daily lesson with Lutz until you are obliged to leave for England, you may come and go here as you please."

"That will be every day, and I shall not go to country houses at all. The more I think of it the more I feel convinced that I should pass this August. My brother has never believed in me, — for good reasons, wise man, — but I have an idea that if I astonish him by passing a year sooner than any one expects, he will be so gratified that he will pay my debts. After all, he stands in the place of my father."

"Are you deeply in debt?" All women sympathize with a man in debt except his wife, who must economize to get him out.

"Horribly!" Ordham buttered a scone and looked as blithe and greedy as a schoolboy on his first day at home.

"You always use such strong expressions!"

"O—h! Re—ally?" Ordham drawled this as only an Englishman can. "Well — perhaps you would not think close upon a thousand pounds a great amount, and I confess I find it disgusting to be unable to pay a sum which if I had in hand would not last me a month. And to Bridgminster it is nothing. I find that more disgusting still."

"I suggested an American girl the other night — but I don't know. Somehow, I don't see you married."

"I should hate to marry. My mother is always urging it — so are all my friends, and I suppose that between extravagant habits and the diplomatic career, I shall be driven into matrimony. But I wish to heaven Bridgminster

would divide his income with me. He spends next to nothing. I hear he doesn't even keep up Ordham."

"Do you want money so much?"

"I need it." He spoke with deep intensity.

"And you can think of no other resource but your brother or a rich girl?"

"No, alas!" He began to butter another scone. "All my relations are either poor or stingy."

"But I had an idea that all dukes were rich and superb — your mother's father — "

"He quarrels with his steward every quarter day over the accounts, the very household bills. I hate him, and so did my father. He cannot endure me because I don't pot birds from the 12th of August until the hunting season begins and then ride to hounds every day. I have an idea he is afraid I will write poetry and disgrace the family. The metre would, no doubt."

Margarethe looked at him curiously. According to American canons she ought to despise him, but he was so inevitably a part of a system, and so replete with all the delightful qualities for which that system was responsible, besides having an accent all his own, that she could but accept him as a matter of course. Nevertheless, more to draw him out than with motive, she asked: "I suppose it has never occurred to you to work?"

"Work?" He barely saved his knife from dropping to the little Sèvres plate. His eyes grew round and his mouth fell slightly apart.

Styr almost laughed outright, but she dropped her eyes to her cup and said: "Well, I am an American, you know. A young man over there, born in a position corresponding to your own — well, if he found himself in debt or wanted money badly, and there was no immediate prospect of inheritance, he would go to work and make it."

"How odd! No, I don't mean that. Of course I know those things do happen, but it must be when they feel fitted, have been prepared — for some of those things that make money. The only time I ever thought about it — one night not long ago," he paled at the memory, "I

could not think of any means by which I could support myself did I lose the little I have. But in America I suppose the business instinct is in every man's brain — naturally. Why shouldn't they be able to make fortunes if they must? Some of our chaps have to go to work also, but I never heard of any of them making a fortune — not even in the colonies. Only people you never heard of before do that. I suppose our brains are too old, they are no longer capable of that amount of concentration and energy. For generations we have had so many interests. To let a fixed idea like money-making control you, I fancy you must have, and inherit, little intellectual development. Nevertheless, I should think that those same indulgences and developments must be among the incentives."

"That is the most ingenious defence I ever heard a lazy man put up! But I am not sure there is not a good deal in it. The fact remains, however, that you want money and do not want to marry. Suppose I send you to my banker in New York? He is a good friend of mine and would give you a chance of some sort. Would you concentrate your very superior faculties upon the making of money?"

"Good heavens, no! I should hate it. To spend one's life trying to be more dishonest than the next man — I had rather live on a younger son's portion all my life." And he elevated his nose in aristocratic disgust.

"It is not quite as bad as that, although I do not pretend that great fortunes are made with gloves on."

"I should hate the people I should be compelled to associate with. As I said just now, it requires enormous concentration to be a successful man of business; and fancy hearing no other topic of conversation day in and out, to see, to feel, nothing else in the men by whom one was surrounded!"

"You might be a cow-boy. That has appealed to other Englishmen, and is more picturesque — quite honest, also, I should think."

"But so dirty, and such a hard life physically. They get up at four and go to bed with their boots on. Then, after they are quite demoralized, all their finer tastes hope-

lessly blunted, they come home without a penny. Heave only knows into what limbo they disappear then. Don think I am really lazy." (There was a genuine anxiety i his tones!) "What you said at Neuschwanstein about th possibility of finishing as a society drone has got me u every morning in time for Fräulein Lutz. I mean to pas my examinations and enter diplomacy. But I am afraid am fitted for nothing else. I haven't stumbled into blindly. It is that or nothing, and although the suggestio was my mother's, my father quite agreed with her."

"It all comes back to this, — you must marry money.

"Alas, yes! But four or five years hence. I will pa these bills somehow, and then I can run up others. The will always wait a few years."

"But suppose you could meet some girl of great wealt whom you could love? That would be the ideal solutio and there are many rich and lovely girls. Should not yo like peace of mind and happiness?"

"Happiness?" He stared at her in a fashion he ha dropped into before, as if she were a mirror in which th future might take form. "I fancy that no matter whom married . . . even if persuaded that I was in love wit her . . . I should no sooner be settled down than should begin to invent some one I might have loved better. He came to himself with a smile. "Will you let me smoke And tell you what a delight it is to see you again? An this room! To think that I may sit in it often! That w are to be friends for a whole summer! Nothing in li can ever be as wonderful as that."

XIX

A DIPLOMATIST IN THE MAKING

THE Queen-mother lingered on in Munich, and society with her. Excellenz Nachmeister and the diplomatic corps entertained constantly, and if the rest of the fashionable world took little initiative, it was always ready to lend the light of its countenance. Ordham, with the most enthusiastic intentions, saw little of Countess Tann, but at least he broke no engagements with her; and this, to those that knew him, would have appeared more significant than had he sought her daily. That pleasure awaited the empty summer months, and meanwhile, conformably with his half-admitted creed, he missed nothing that promised enjoyment. Nevertheless, true to his promise to Margarethe Styr, he took his daily lesson with Fräulein Lutz; and this recalls a story which became current in Munich at the time and entertained his friends not a little. Lutz related it with a mixture of tartness and triumph to Styr, who told it to Nachmeister, who ——

His Grenadier, as he called her, arrived at the Legation every morning at five minutes before ten. He received her in an upper sitting room, and had made more progress in four weeks than during the six preceding months of his sojourn in Munich. As a rule he appeared at the rendezvous not more than five or six minutes later than Lutz, but one morning he arose with the greatest reluctance. He had taken a party of English friends to the monastic cellar of the Hofbräu the night before, and sat up until late listening to the students singing, and drinking beer in an atmosphere as thick as a London fog. He wanted to lie in bed until noon, but dared not run the risk of the loss of

his Lutz. He arose when called, but entered the frigid presence quite twelve minutes late. Being greeted with a withering outburst, he was suddenly inspired to torment this iron-clad female, for whom he appeared to have no more magnetism than had he been a wooden dummy into which she was employed to drill holes and instil so much German per day. He sank into the deepest chair in the room, and drawled:

"I am *so* sorry —"

"That is the one thing you can say fluently in German! At least one thousand times have I heard you say it."

"Oh — but I am — really. Not to be late, but to be obliged to come at all. I was so deliciously comfortable."

"Deliciously — in bed — at this hour! What an admission for a man to make!"

"But to you I am only a boy," murmured Ordham.

"Ach ja! But you would like to be thought a man. Nicht? When you have succeeded in raising a mustache you will want to be thought young again. I have taught hundreds of your sex, and not one has more sense than the other. But not one!"

"Is that the reason you have never married?"

Her mottled complexion turned a uniform purple, and she investigated his innocent orbs with her bright little black eyes. Then she demanded haughtily: "What is that to you? Am I here to answer personal questions?"

"But this is the morning for conversation, Fräulein. We had those hideous verbs yesterday. And I am so tired! That was so easy, so natural to say, for I know that at least one Herr Professor carries an arrow in his heart."

The personage in question had eluded Fräulein Lutz with such conspicuous adroitness some years before that the affair had become historical. She felt a natural gratification that the story had altered its front with the lapse of time, but replied severely: "Enough! We will ask and answer questions of a less personal nature. Also! How many neckties do you possess? I have now taught you for four weeks and I have seen a new one every day."

"And she calls that an impersonal question! But I am quite ready to answer, liebes Fräulein, for my man informed me yesterday. I possess exactly two hundred and eighty-four."

"Two hundred and eighty-four neckties!" shrieked Fräulein Lutz. "It is impossible! But impossible!"

"Only until this afternoon. Then I shall possess two hundred and eighty-six. And next week I expect a box from London—"

"But it is incredible. Why, I have taught counts, barons, *princes* for thirty years, and I do not believe that one of them possessed more than ten or twelve neckties at a time."

"O—h—h—h—"

"Don't dare to turn up your English nose at counts and princes — princes of the blood, let me explain. Ach Gott! Ach Gott!" She looked him over. "And socks, handkerchiefs — all match! Do you assert that you have two hundred and eighty-four handkerchiefs, shirts, pairs of socks? Answer in idiomatic German or I shall make you write it."

She did make him write it. Once more he lay back exhausted. Taking out a handkerchief, he sniffed at it, then waved it gently.

"And scent!" She almost choked. "I have noticed it before, but was too polite to make remarks. To-day I relieve my mind. Scent is obnoxious, demoralizing, intended only for idle fine ladies and those others whom we never mention. Why do you use scent? Mind your idiom."

He sank into a posture almost reclining; he half closed his eyes and half opened his mouth. He looked very naughty indeed. "Why?" he murmured dreamily. "Because I find in perfumes one of the exquisite sensations of life. I should like to lie in bed all day while some one sprinkled the crude air with distilled odours — and dream — ah!"

"I've a mind to box your ears!" she cried furiously and with a very red face. "And your German is as execrable as your sentiments."

"Dictate it to me in pure German and I will learn it."

"I would not pollute my lips. Sit up and say after me: 'I am a silly young English puppy, who should be striding through the Englischergarten reciting German verbs aloud when I am dawdling in bed like a scented harlot—'"

"Oh! oh! I shall not. How shocking of you! Mein liebes Fräulein!" And he stared at her so incredulously that she felt uncomfortable.

"Well, you deserve to have harsh things said to you," she growled, "and you would demoralize the vocabulary of a saint. Also! I shall converse with you no more. Conjugate the verb '*arbeiten*,' and then read aloud three pages of *Wallenstein*. If you mispronounce a word, it shall be four, and there will be two more verbs. Sit up!"

He meekly obeyed her; and when she had stalked out he hastened to the tennis court and played until luncheon.

That evening Fräulein Lutz, sitting alone in her musty little flat, her spectacles astride her nose, muttering aloud over the notes she had graciously been permitted to cull from the royal archives, became the astounded recipient of an immense bunch of violets. They were royal purple in colour and wet with what might have been the dew of the Riviera, whence they came. But they were quite scentless. If she suspected the donor she made no sign, and on the following morning was more than commonly snappish. But the wide streamers of purple satin ribbon which held the violets together decorated her best bonnet till the last of her days.

XX

ISOLDE

THE opera house, notwithstanding its great parquet and five tiers almost encircling the auditorium, holding some twenty-two hundred people, was always well filled; but Ordham had never seen it as crowded as to-night. There had been an official announcement that the King would honour the season's last performance of *Tristan und Isolde*, and the blue lights were burning all over the house, softening its classic severity into the mysterious twilight of some vast sea grotto whose surges held captive and coloured the rays of the moon. Of course, at the last moment the King would change his royal mind; everybody felt sure of that; yet, so obstinate is hope, even society had turned out, satisfied to honour Styr, at least, before departing for the country. The boxes beside the stage, and at the back, flanking the King's (which rose from the *balkon* to the last of the galleries), always reserved for royalties, their households and guests, were generally empty. To-night they were filled, and, with the front row of the fashionable *balkon*, gave the house a smarter appearance than usual; the good hausfrau, genuine lover of all the arts as she was, never thought of wearing anything but her street frock, consisting at this time of a skirt, overskirt, and basque — whose points stood upright, back and front. Her daughter, perchance, enlivened the useful shade of her costume by a bit of pink or blue tulle about the turned-in neck of her basque. The good man was shabby and comfortable in his business suit. Had it not been for the liberal patronage of officers, the *parkett* would have presented a dreary expanse, and even the fashionable women, unless the court

was to be present, seldom thought the opera worthy of full dress. To-night, however, there were many bare necks and fine gowns, jewels and feathers, in the *balkon* and loges, and even in the front rows of the *parkett*, which many, Ordham among them, preferred as affording a better view of the performers. The orchestra, under its great conductor, Lévy, never fretted the most sensitive ear-drum.

Few sit until the last bell has rung, and Ordham stood with the rest, his back to the stage, viewing what to him was always an interesting sight, and feeling so blithe and happy in his regained freedom, his mother's promise, received that morning, to persuade his creditors to hold their peace until after his examinations, the flutter of anticipation which he always enjoyed when about to hear Styr sing one of her great rôles, that long after, when he sat in this opera house for the last time in his life, he recalled that night and his boyish spirits, and wondered if the world had remodelled itself meanwhile.

He saw many that he knew, and bowed in his formal way, lit now and again by his quick smile, so full of youthful brilliancy and sweetness that tired befeathered old women shook their heads and doubted if a young man of so many attractions would ever amount to anything. But when Nachmeister was favoured with that smile to-night, she nodded her head sagely and felt that she could depart for her spa in peace on the morrow. No man in love, or nearing the border-land of tumult, could smile like that. She was a guest in a box beside the King's, the one allotted to Lola Montez during her brief reign in Bavaria, when Ludwig I was king. She too had been elevated to the Bavarian aristocracy, and no royalty won more than a passing glance when Countess Landsfeldt sat magnificently in this box, flashing her bold black eyes at the patricians that feared and snubbed her; far less clever than Styr, few doors had opened to her. Princess Nachmeister was surrounded by a bevy of young princesses, pretty with youth, but insipid, as most young royalties are. The Queen-mother sat alone in the great box, looking old

and sad, not a vestige of her beauty surviving, nor even of that air which is supposed to distinguish a queen from a hausfrau. She was dowdy and unattractive, but she cared not; to-morrow she would be in her humble retreat, Elbingen-Alp, alone with her memories and the new consolation she had found in the Church of Rome. She, too, hoped for the presence of her son to-night, but she, too, knew that he would not come.

It was half-past six when word came from the palace that his Majesty, indisposed, had left for Linderhof; the last bell rang, darkness descended upon the house, the overture began. As Ordham sat with his eyes closed lest they be diverted by the fat red necks and plastered heads, which shone in the dusk, mayhap by hungry jaws munching chocolate or peppermint, his high spirits slid down into a fathomless abyss; that tide of sweet despair swirled round and over him, driving repose, content, gayety from every chamber of his soul, and filling it with unrest, vague delicious terrors, that made him move his arms restlessly until he succumbed utterly.

Never had been and never will be so full an expression of unsatisfied longing. Surge upon surge from the opening phrase, presaging a yearning that is not all bliss and a torment that is not all pain, so long as mortals may die; surge upon surge of aching passion, sweet oblivion, mortal disappointment, infinite desire, a love that only the immortals could satisfy and only death can quench. The imagination reels along with this appalling betrayal of mortal love. The curse and the boon of imagination, the indomitable pursuit of happiness, even while the mind holds its sides like a chuckling monk, the inevitable awaking, the cry for death, annihilation, Nirvana, — all and far more are in this mighty tonal dirge of the human heart to lift Wagner's masterpiece to the apex of all the masterpieces the world has preserved.

Unsatisfied longing! Ordham never listened to this music-drama that he did not wonder its keynote should possess him irresistibly throughout the performance and desert him when it was over. Even in the foyer, dur-

ing the pauses, he was the cool young modern with inherited experiences in his brain that pushed him far from the sources of nature; but when the surges beat on his spirit once more he was the immemorial lover.

On the stage Styr was always beautiful and never more so than as Isolde, with her soft golden wig, her dark eyes enlarged, their natural mobility enhanced by subtle arts which other stage women secretly studied in vain, her ivory-white luminous skin. In the first act she wore a flowing gown of an imperial blue shade, the perfect lines of her long arms enticing under floating gauze, her long throat rising bare with the plastic firmness which she might have inherited from the woman that inspired the dreams of Solomon.

When Isolde raised herself slowly from the cushions of the couch in the pavilion of the ship which was bearing her to the old king of Cornwall she had consented to marry, abandoning something of her first attitude of utter despair, and lifting her head toward the joyous singing of the sailors, her eyes in one long look expressed everything. The dullest could not entertain the delusion that here was merely an unhappy young princess of "Irenland," speeding against her will to fulfil a detestable marriage, but a woman of the maturest passions, who had already drunk deep of the cup of love, scornful of every law that might exist for princess or peasant, and who had watched and waited, and accepted the fact of betrayal.

And the audience felt itself, not in the presence merely of a woman eaten with hatred, fury, desire for vengeance, but of a primeval force, passion incarnate, such as Earth unlooses in convulsions that have annihilated millions and buried continents. No other Isolde has ever been as great as Styr, for no other has been able to suggest this ferocious approach of a devastating force, this hurricane sweeping across the mind's invisible plain, tearing at the very foundations of life. And all this she expressed before singing a note, with her staring moving eyes, her eloquent body, still and concealed as it was, a gesture of the hand. It was a concentration of the mental faculties, such as

gives weak women superhuman physical strength in moments of terror or anger; in her own case they were whipped up like a whirlwind by the released horrors in her soul, and used with a supreme exercise of art that made her the risen Isolde.

When she started up, crying out to the wind and waves to shatter the ship, the passion in her voice hardly expressed the rage consuming her in plainer terms than that first long silent moment had done.

Styr's transitions from wildness to gloom, to bitter wildness again, then to a regal imperiousness, when she ordered Brängane to summon Tristan (which must have made the royal women present envy the majesty of soul that could inform poor commonplace flesh with so dread a mien), were all done with that complete abandonment to her rôle of the great artist who never for a moment addresses her audience. Then, once more, she betrayed in her strained eyes and body her outraged womanhood as Brängane was courteously repulsed by Tristan (alas! very fat), standing with folded arms at the helm, and taunted by Kurwenal and the sailors. Upon the tirewoman's return, after a moment's futile attempt at self-control, she broke forth into a furious denunciation of the false lover, mingling it with bitter reminiscences of a time so fatal to herself when he was ill and at her mercy, and she healed and loved him. The anger gradually faded from her voice, which softened into the most exquisite tenderness and sweetness. "His eyes on mine were fastened. . . . the sword dropped from my fingers!" In that brooding moment every woman in the audience recalled the unforgettable, the eyes of the young widened with terror and hope.

But that moment was brief. Her wrongs beat upon her brain again. With their recital to the trembling Brängane she worked herself up to that tremendous climax where, flinging her back against the drawn curtains, with arms outstretched, she screamed out her curses, invoking vengeance and death.

Never theatrical, and conveying the impression through-

out the greater part of that act, in which she ran the gamut of the passions, that she let escape but the smoke of the terrible fires below, when she did give way to ungovernable fury, she lashed the hidden rivers of blood before the footlights to such a pitch that it is no wonder the Germans keep on calling for more sensation, more thrill, with an insatiety which will work the ruin of music and drama in their nation unless some genius totally different from Wagner rises and diverts them into safer channels. Beyond Wagner in his own domain there is nothing but sensationalism. Rather, he took all the gold out of the mine he discovered and left but base alloy for the misguided disciple.

Not the least impressive moment in this terrible act was when Styr, after staring at the phials in the casket while the idea of death matured in her desperate brain,—death for herself as well as for the man that betrayed her,—raised her head slowly, her body to its full height. She looked the very genius of death, a malign fate awaiting its moment to settle upon the ripest fruit, the blithest hopes. A subtle gesture of her hand seemed to deprive it of its flesh, leave it a talon which held a scythe; by the same token one saw the skeleton under the blue robe; her mouth twisted into a grin, her eyes sank. It was all over in half a minute, it was but a fleeting suggestion, but it flashed out upon every sensitive soul present a picture of the charnel house, the worm, death robbed of its poetry, stripped to the bones by the hot blasts from that caldron of hate.

When, having compelled Tristan to drink the love potion which Brängane, who has no taste for crime, mixed instead of the draught of death, when, from the dark abysses of suicide and murder, her soul rose slowly and dazedly, but free, to the heights of the mightiest of all the passions, Styr was so superb in her abandonment, so sweet in her surrender, she carried this act of many emotions to a climax so acute and so satisfying, that few in her audience but felt the sequel should be given on the following night.

The curtain went down as Isolde was torn from Tristan's arms by her tirewomen and old King Mark boarded the

ship. Styr appeared again and again in response to loud cries, clapping, and stamping, which lasted for nearly ten minutes. But at last the audience went forth to refresh itself at the buffet. Ordham did not rise at once. He sat next to the central rope and was undisturbed. He was holding fast to that last picture of Isolde with her dazed yet illuminated eyes in which the love allowance of Earth seemed to be concentrated, when his own eyes unwittingly fell upon the woman that occupied the seat in front of him. She had neatly turned back her overskirt and skirt, and from the capacious pocket of her petticoat was extracting two large sandwiches, a slab of chocolate, and an apple. He gave an almost audible groan and went out into the foyer to exchange "*Wunderschöns*" with his friends.

The second act, greatest of all love scenes as it is, is far less of a strain on the audience than the first. When Tristan and Isolde, having expressed their joy in meeting in that succession of ecstatic love cries which makes the words feeble and superfluous, sank down upon the bench (that astigmatic couch!) and the love duet began, Ordham once more closed his eyes and listened, with his soul detached from his body, to that voice of fluid gold, melting, fainting, fiery, dreaming, despairing, expressing every phase of the phenomenon of love. Never has the ecstasy and the futility of love been expressed as here, and when Styr, her voice returning from those starry voids where Isolde's soul had borne Tristan's, passionately demanded death as the only relief for the insupportable tension of body and spirit, although she did not move, she conveyed the impression of a still more complete abandon. The tenor, being of immense proportions, and with his eyes seldom roving from the baton of the conductor, conveyed no such impression, or the scene might have been unbearably descriptive. But in Germany either the tenor or the soprano, by the entire respectability of their earthly mediums, can be relied upon to modify the most licentious opera ever written.

As Ordham did not like this particular tenor, he remained in the foyer until Tristan had finished his bleating

and ranting in the last act — that vicious test of a tenor's histrionic powers, as of his vocal endurance — and bribed the doorkeeper to let him enter later and stand while Styr sang the *Liebestod*. Sometimes she rose to her feet as if impelled upward by the intensity of her vision; but to-night she chose to exhibit the physical weakness of delirium as the soul struggled free of the relaxing flesh, the ecstasy of death. Styr always triumphed anew in that supreme effort of Wagner, and on this night when the curtain fell the audience "went quite mad." While the house was ringing with "Styr!" "Styr!" "Styr!" Ordham conceived a sudden resolution. He had invited Princess Nachmeister, Mr. Trowbridge, and several other friends to sup with him at Maximilia; and although nothing was better known in Munich than that Styr never accepted invitations to supper after one of her performances, was never to be seen, for that matter, he determined to persuade her to join his party. It would gratify his vanity hugely to succeed where all had failed, and he craved the new experience of talking with her immediately after she had created the greatest of her illusions.

He had been behind the scenes with Kilchberg, who loved a maiden in the chorus, and he knew the location of Styr's dressing room, although he had never caught a glimpse of her in or near it. He was determined to see her to-night; and he did!

He had made his way across the back of the stage, passed open doors of supers who were frankly disrobing, too hungry to observe the minor formalities, and was approaching the room of the prima donna, when its door was suddenly flung open, a little man was rushed out by the collar, twirled round, and hurled almost at his feet. The Styr, her own hair down, her face livid, her eyes blazing, shouted hoarsely at the object of her wrath, who took to his heels. The *intendant* rushed upon the scene. Styr screamed out that the minor official had dared to come to her dressing-room with a criticism upon the set of her wig, and that if ever she were spoken to again at the close of a performance by any member of the staff, from

the *intendant* down, she would leave Munich the same night. The great functionary fled, for she threatened to box his own ears unless he took himself out of her sight, and the Styr stormed up and down, beat the scenery with her hands, stamped, hissed, her pallor deepening every second, until it was like white fire. Ordham, half fascinated, half convulsed, at this glimpse of the artistic temperament in full blast, stared at her with his mouth open. She looked like some fury of the coal-pit, flying up from the sooty galleries on the wings of her voice. Her words had been delivered with a strange broad burring accent, which Ordham found more puzzling than her tantrum.

Suddenly she caught sight of him. If possible her fury waxed.

"You! You!" she screamed. "Go! Get out of here! How dare you come near me? I hate you! I hate the whole world when I have finished an opera! They ought to give me somebody to kill! Go! I don't care whether you ever speak to me again or not—"

Ordham, not knowing whether he should feel insulted or philosophical, beat a hasty retreat; and, remaining late at Maximilia, had no time to ponder upon the matter that night. He had barely awakened in the morning when he received the following note:

"DEAR MR. ORDHAM: You will recall that I told you it would be better to think of me as a stage woman only?—although at that time I did not include the greenroom among your possible experiences. If I cannot make you understand the fearful state of excitement which an opera like *Isolde* induces, then indeed I hope you will not forgive me, never come near me again. But I fancy that you have already forgiven me. I was a wild beast. The actress born with the power to portray Isolde has it in her to be the worst woman in the world—much simpler than to reach those heights (her heights) toward which, alas! there is little pulsion. It is all over a few hours later, after I have taken a long walk in the Englischergarten, then eaten a prosaic supper of cold ham and fowl, eggs perchance, and salad! But for an hour after those triumphs I pay! I pay!

"Do not reply to this, but come on Thursday to supper or not, as you will.

"MARGARETHE STYR."

XXI

THE WOMAN BY THE ISAR

ORDHAM had no intention of ignoring the impromptu to which he had been treated, whether she expected it of him or not, and on the following Thursday evening, as they were drinking coffee in the garden after supper, he said abruptly:

"I should not have recognized your voice the other night if I had not seen you — ah — when you demolished that poor little man. Is — is it the native American?"

"One variety." Her present tones were dry, but without displeasure. "It was the voice of the Middle West. When I was Peggy Hill, working in the coal-mines — and for several years after — the burrs on my voice were as thick as a chestnut tree's. Insensibly, in New York, they began to peel off, and soon after I went on the stage I fell in love with purity of diction and studied with an English teacher of elocution until I retained not a trace of even the generic American. But when I lose my temper it bursts out of its little dungeon exactly as other bad characteristics do when we are off guard. I used to flatter myself that I had uprooted certain qualities I resented having been born with, but I have discovered that they occupy remote chambers of my brain, biding their time. Perhaps I was one of the viragoes of the French Revolution!"

"Did you — once let it go rather often? Somehow you seemed so wonderfully natural."

"I let it go pretty often down in that opera house. Men have such tact! Fancy telling a singer at the end of a performance, when every nerve in her body is a red-hot humming wire, that her wig was not on straight! The *inten-*

dant came to me one night after the first act of *Isolde* and presumed to criticise my tempo. I threw a hand mirror at him, and he has never visited my dressing-room since. I would have treated the King in the same fashion, but he is the one man that would never make such a mistake. Wagner has a good deal to answer for! The lyrics are excitable enough, but the music of The Master creates a madness; it sets up a vibration in the nervous system, which, added to the obsession of the characters, lifts us bodily from the plane of the normal, and no doubt works permanent changes. I am talking, of course, of singers that have temperament as well as voice." She lit a cigarette and leaned back in her rustic chair. "Before? — Oh, yes. But less and less as time went on. Tantrums do not hurt a prima donna; in fact they are of use in inspiring the authorities with awe. But in the private life — well, the price I sometimes had to pay was too high. I soon stopped throwing things about like a fishwife; and all the rest of it."

Ordham studied her face attentively in the pause that followed. Apparently she had forgotten him, and was staring into the deep arbours beyond the river. Her profile looked hard and cruel, sharpened against the black shadow of the trees, like the fine edge of an axe. He held his breath as the expression deepened into sullen ferocity, then stood up, overturning his chair.

"I should like to know every bit of your history," he said, "every detail."

"How you would hate me!"

"I think not. Some people might have hated you the other night when you looked like all the furies, but I was the more interested. The usual does not appeal to me particularly."

"But there is a limit! If ever I want you to hate me, I will tell you the story of my life, as they say in New York."

"Why in New York?"

"It is a bit of slang, and New York is the factory of much of the American slang and a sort of clearing-house for the rest. Does not our slang appeal to you?"

"I find it utterly meaningless," he said candidly. "O
is bad enough, but at least it has some point."

"That ours has none is the whole point. It takes
sharp American wits to understand a new bit of slang
a new joke; the cryptic quality of both, indeed, has pla
its part in sharpening those same wits. If you are
ever on the alert over there, you go under."

"Really? What a bore!"

She laughed as naturally as a child, but even in
mirth she no longer betrayed the nurture of the W

"You are so delightfully genuine! The American im
tion of the British aristocrat is the funniest thing in
world. You are not unhumorous from our crude point
view, but I doubt if you could really be affected if
tried, and you never would try. And yet over there
would be thought a mass of affectations."

"I hope I'll never go 'over there.' I've scarcely e
met an American that I liked. The women want too m
waiting on, and I always have a feeling that the men
spise me."

"Perhaps they do, understanding no type but their ov
few have had the opportunity to study the men of ot
races. To an American the man with no capacity for wo
to 'hustle,' no desire to fight his way to the top, sim
encumbers the earth. I hope you never will go over.
matter how good an Englishman's manners may be
home, they become abominable the moment he sets foo
the United States. Even yours might not stand the
— whatever that test is."

"I am sure they are merely terrified. We are not acc
tomed to reporters, interviewers, to an avalanche of inv
tions from people we don't know. It is enough to ter
any one; and being a shy race — not having had your
eral education! — we shrink into a sort of panoply of w
We don't go over meaning to be rude, but we are dri
to appear so rather than show our fright and look ridi
lous. One of my cousins visited the United States a y
or two ago, just after he came into his title, and he was
hounded by reporters and lion hunters, that after doubl

and dodging until he was worn out, he gave himself the airs of a stage lord and succeeded in freezing them off. Then the journalists wrote vicious articles calling him a snob — It would seem that like a good many others, they do not know exactly what that word means. And Jim is as decent a little chap as you could find in England."

"Well, you misjudge us too. You are always commiserating the American husbands left at home to coin dollars while their wives swarm over Europe. If you only knew how delighted the American husband is to get rid of his wife for a few months out of the year! But come, let us go in. I know that you long for an easy chair and to see your cigarette smoke, while I dare not sit out too late. Who is not a slave of some sort?"

XXII

PRINCESS NACHMEISTER AS GUARDIAN ANGEL

He graduated from the easy chair to the divan by imperceptible degrees, for he had arts of his own; and in the course of a month of well-nigh daily intercourse he was almost as much at home in the villa by the Isar as Styr herself. Insensibly he began to assume airs of ownership, which made Margarethe wonder how her sense of humour had hitherto survived with so little to feed upon. He never gave her a sentimental glance, nor, not even when they talked till two in the morning and he left by the tower window in Kilchberg's boat, did he in any way manifest a desire to make love to her. Nevertheless, it was quite evident that he had drifted into the assumption that the great prima donna, from whom no other man in Europe could claim more than a bow, or a few meaningless phrases at a rout, existed for him alone; that her time, her mind, her affections, were his; that, putting the attitude into the American nutshell, he owned her. And yet, while his bearing was a mixture of the husband, the friend, the lover, and the spoilt child, it was all on the mental plane; nor did he ever lose a certain formality, which indeed was so integral a part of his birthright that no intimacy of his would ever descend into the too dangerous places of familiarity.

If, as time went on, Styr was at some pains to analyze a relationship so foreign to the usual, no such fatiguing process had ever occurred to him. He accepted it all as a matter of course, as he did whatever good things came his way; it was only the rare scowl of fortune that gave him

astonished pause. He sometimes threw a passing smile to an intimacy which had all the surface appearance of so much more, and appreciated the piquancy of this secret and unique experience. Now and again, too, he threw a bone of gratitude to Frau von Wass for curing him of whatever hankering for intrigue he may once have cherished, however languidly; although he was under no delusion in regard to Styr, knowing well that did he drop into even the usual gallantries he would be snubbed for his pains. Commonly, however, he wasted no time on thought, not even upon that inevitable future in which this rare and delightful companion could have no part. But when was he inclined to invoke the future unless his creditors were impertinent, or he dreamed vaguely of some strange exalted happiness for which he saw no parallel in life? At present his hopeful debtors were awaiting the sure enthusiasm of Lord Bridgminster when his brilliant heir had passed triumphantly into the diplomatic service; and if he sometimes dreamed, it was not of the woman he liked best on earth: she, being always at hand, why, in heaven's name, should he dream of her?

Before leaving Munich, Princess Nachmeister had resolved upon a bold move. Too astute to mention the name of Mabel Cutting, she yet confided to the woman who, it was patent, alone possessed any real influence over her favourite, that his mother and friends were arranging a wholly desirable alliance for him, and only delayed bringing the two young people together until the girl should have gained the poise and experience of a London season, and he should have assimilated, undistracted, the knowledge of German necessary for his examinational ordeal.

"You are the subtlest of women," continued the old diplomat. "Instil the expedience of an early and wealthy marriage into the mind of this most extravagant of princelings. Gott! One would think that my lord of Bridgminster was eighty and living on pap, not a red-faced sportsman of less than forty. That dear little boy! I fairly shudder when I imagine his future without an

income practically unlimited." She pressed her mummified old hand close upon Styr's, a rare amenity in one that never permitted Munich to forget that she was its social dictator and the intimate friend of the Queen-mother. "Yes, that dear little boy! Cannot you conjure up his unhappy fate if he flings away this great opportunity and goes on at this pace for five years longer on the income of a younger son?"

"I think the dear little boy will always fall on his feet, whether he marry this particular heiress or not. It seems to be the mission of certain of our sex to take care of him, extricate, engineer him. I have had this greatness thrust upon me, and I seem humbly to accept it. No doubt it is as much a part of my destiny as to cheer up the King at midnight with that black auditorium between us!"

"Well, it is our duty to help others," said the Nachmeister piously. "And particularly these young things that think the world is their footstool, and go on thinking so until too late. Two things our *jüngling* must do during the next two years: pass his examinations and marry. You will not deny that he has the making of a remarkable man in him?"

"He is astonishingly developed mentally, but a more lazy, lymphatic, self-indulgent, supine creature I never met in my life. If he were an American, that brain of his would be supplemented by the 'git-up-and-git' that would enable him to make a great man of himself unassisted. Now, it will be others that will lead him, drive him, to the goal. He'll never lift a finger for himself."

"Well, what matter?" asked the European. "I am sure he would not be half so delicious did he have that dreadful — how do you call it? — No! He would not be himself at all. If he becomes a great man, if his brain and talents find their opportunity, what difference whether he or others clear the way? And while I could wish myself thirty years younger, I am quite resigned to accomplish my humble part behind the scenes and leave to you the great work of giving our young friend to Europe. Will you, dear Gräfin?"

"I have quite made up my mind to keep his lofty nose to the grindstone until the last of August — if his mother sends in his name on the first of June as she proposes, he must take his examinations within three months. I do not leave Munich myself until the last week in August, and I can make him work by threatening to get a leave of absence from the King on the plea of ill health and to go yachting with some acquaintances that invite me every year. Lutz promises to remain in Munich if he will study faithfully."

"What original phrases you have! Why did not we ever talk in English before? Ah, yes! That will be a great work, but you will also help me in the other matter?"

"Yes, I think he should marry, since he will not work."

"Work?"

"The only fault I find with our charming youth is that he expects the world to support him, and could not make ten dollars a month if he tried. Nor would he try."

"Gott! He cannot go out into the market-place like your Americans. He is destined for the high places of the world. Surely you know our points of view by this time, dear Gräfin. For portionless young men of our aristocracies must rich young women be found, who thus buy a better position than the one to which they were born. That is right and just. And when a young man has the talents and prospects of our friend — Gott! but he gives far more than he expects, even if he takes possession of the entire fortune. And in any case, must not girls have husbands?"

"Who is the girl in question?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you. Personally, I do not know Lady Bridgminster; but a friend of hers writes me these things. I am assured, however, that the girl is all that we could wish. Of course he will not love her, but what of that? He will always be polite to her, and that is much! much!"

"Why do you think he will not love her?"

"Why — why —" Excellenz was quite positive that he would be quite as enamoured as any other young husband,

during the honeymoon. "Oh, these young men brought up by married women — they always love women older than themselves. No doubt it will be you, *ma belle Marguerite.* That will do him no harm — but make him marry the girl."

"He will not fall in love with me. I shall see to it that no such idea enters his head. As he will have to be engineered into love as into everything else, he is quite safe not to discover my fascinations unaided."

"Ah, dear Gräfin, you Americans are so clever! Between us all, I feel confident that our dear young friend will have one of the most brilliant careers in Europe. Is it not so?"

"I do not worry in the least," Styr had responded dryly.

Two days later Princess Nachmeister, satisfied, went off to drink the waters at her favourite spa; but promptly upon the first day of every week she received a letter from a member of the bureau of secret police.

XXIII

ONE OF THE POTTERIES

THE greater part of Ordham's reserve melted, as was natural, when he sprawled on the divan with his coat off on a hot day, and his hostess sat in her rocking-chair fanning herself and wearing one of those white lawn wrappers that an American woman would retain in her wardrobe were she elevated to a throne. By no means frank by temperament, he indulged in frankness as a sort of luxury where his confidence had been won; and feeling more intimate with Styr than he had ever felt with anybody, he talked to her freely about himself, his family, his hopes, desires, and sentiments toward most things, until Margarethe knew him far better than either of them realized at the time.

But he was not fond of talking about himself, nor of personalities in general. Books, the theatre, life, the mysterious back-waters of human nature, interested him far more. He always brought out his London newspaper, and being too lazy to read aloud himself, made her read to him the news of the day and the editorial comment, while he explained the relationship of the present to the immediate past. Her house was littered with reviews, the works of the various masters he was obliged to study, and of the novelists and poets of the day: George Meredith, Turgénev, Rossetti, Swinburne, Browning. They wrangled across the dissecting-table of Maupassant, and picked the jewelled bones of Flaubert.

She went often to the theatre with him, sitting behind the curtains of a box; and, several famous *Gasts* from other capitals coming to Munich that summer, there were

few pastimes they enjoyed more than this, the drama being the one subject upon which they were in perfect accord. Moreover, as the play was a diversion which she had never denied herself, she experienced no uneasy consciousness of knocking down outposts of old defences.

It was on the nights after the theatre that he remained until the small hours; he always returned with her for supper, as she would not go to a restaurant with him. There are no people wiser in human conduct than servants, and the comment indulged in between the old butler and the maids was upon the astonishing impeccancy of the relationship above stairs. Had it been otherwise, these good Bavarians would have taken it as a matter of course and made no comment whatever. The ingenuous morals of the Bavarians were a source of evergreen interest to Styr, who had been brought up in a country that wore silk over its rags. Upon one occasion, however, she was more embarrassed than moved to ethical musings. She was sitting with Ordham in the gallery after the evening meal, when her housemaid entered and asked permission to leave on the following morning for Leoni, her native village. Kurt withheld his consent, so she appealed to her gnädige frau.

"What is the matter that you go so suddenly, and when do you return?" asked Margarethe, who did not like her household upset.

"I think I cannot return, Frau Gräfin. One of my children is ill, and as I shall soon have another — which will make three — Heinrich and I have decided that it will now be cheaper to marry."

Ordham, who was willing to discuss in the abstract all questions under the sun, blushed scarlet and dropped out of a window into the garden. Countess Tann remarked tartly:

"Indeed! It is a pity you did not think of it sooner, and then your other two children would have had the advantage of legal birth."

"That matters not, gnädige frau, and we must be sure of children to support us when we are old and tired, *before we marry* and perchance have none. And, then,

apart, we can make more money for some years, and the babies can be farmed until they become too many. Divorce is not easy with us, gnädige frau, as in America, and we find this arrangement right and just. It works well."

Styr, who had never supposed the beer-soaked brain of a Bavarian peasant to be capable of any reasoning process whatever, looked at the girl with more interest. She was a plain heavily built creature, but nothing could be more honest, amiable, and sensible than her face.

"Very well! Tell Kurt to give you a month's extra wages and to engage a new maid at once, I hope you will find your child better and have a merry wedding."

The girl kissed her hand, protested gratitude, and withdrew.

"After all," said Margarethe, when Ordham ventured to return, "who shall say? In Zulu land the biggest liar is king."

"At least they have the advantage of the support of society! Ours are no better and are such shocking hypocrites, when no worse — you never hear of infanticide in this country. Probably most morality could be sifted down to utility. It is wrapped up in charming and traditional sentiments, but the kernel is plastic. These peasants find it more economical after the third discretion to set up an establishment of their own. For most of us, alas! the straight and narrow way is a more comfortable fit in the long run."

"The simplicity and safety of your philosophy is delightful, but I fancy your temperament has saved you from a good many disasters. And I am told that you very nearly scorched your fingers not so long ago, and that only a goitre saved you. Do you ever think of poor little Frau von Wass dosing and varnishing herself in her lonely castle?"

Ordham scowled, and when he scowled he no longer looked very young. "I do not think of things I wish to forget," he said shortly. "What is the use?"

"None whatever! How fortunate you are. No doubt you will forget all this a month after the inevitable end."

"Oh! oh! How can you say such a thing?" He shook his finger at her, his gayety instantly restored. "Besides, I shall never be very far away. I shall always be coming back to see you. Munich, thank heaven, is in the middle of Europe. I shall come here often, no matter where I am sent."

"Suppose you are sent to St. Petersburg or the United States?"

"I shall manage not to be. Great heaven! Fancy not to be able to see you for months at a time!" He looked appalled.

"What if you marry?"

"What difference will that make?" He moved his head impatiently and sighed, throwing himself back on the divan and biting a tassel of one of the cushions. "I dread returning to England. Only this morning I had a letter from my mother. She has some English girl or other picked out for me. At first she wrote a lot about an American girl with a fortune, the daughter of a friend of hers; but now, it seems, these dear friends have quarrelled, or my mother no longer admires Americans. At all events she is all for marrying me to some rich English girl of my own class that she has found."

"No doubt she is quite right. Please don't eat up my cushion."

"I am *so* sorry!"

"Is the English girl beautiful?"

"I suppose so. My mother would not venture to recommend her otherwise. She knows that I hate ugliness as she does herself — and am not fond of English girls." He shrugged his shoulders. "Let her amuse herself. One thing is positive: I shall marry to please myself."

"I wonder?"

"What do you mean by that?" Ordham had eyes capable of a great variety of expressions. Now they looked large and cold. "Do you fancy I could be married against my will?"

"Always remember that the cleverest of men is no match for a clever woman, and if two or three clever

women—" She halted, recalling her compact. "Why should you object to being steered into the matrimonial harbour by your wise mother? She is far less likely to make a mistake than you are, for you are too indolent to give such a grave subject the proper amount of deliberation. And you would soon tire of any girl you married, for you have the order of mind that demands variety. You can find that in friendships, so why miss the opportunity of an advantageous marriage."

Ordham set his long jaw. "My mother shall not pick out my wife. The very fact that she insisted upon one of any two girls would make me believe the other was the better suited to all my requirements. I and my mother are too like and too unlike to judge for each other."

XXIV

THE CRACK IN THE JAR

THERE were times when Margarethe Styr, so long a recluse, felt embarrassed and awkward in this new and unique intimacy, little as Ordham suspected it; and there were others when she felt an almost irresistible longing to practise the arts of the enchantress and unwrap the lethargy in which her singular young friend appeared to be swaddled — fold by fold. She hated the brute in man as sullenly as ever; but personal vanity — which once had driven her to a ferocious love of power — had been starved for eight years, and, refusing to give up the ghost, sometimes muttered its rights. She imagined scenes in the gallery with the windows open to the moonlight and the warm scented vocal night, when this brilliant but lymphatic young man, under the arts of the accomplished siren, not one of which she had forgotten, would suddenly find himself the passionate determined lover. But the temptation rarely lingered, and finally passed. She indulged in no dream at any time of response, and any such violent dislocation of their present relations could only result in rupture. He would never forgive her, and she should always remember him as looking very young and ridiculous. As it was, she rarely thought of his age, and it was not long before she realized that she had in her hands the clay with which to model the one perfect experience of her life. When she discovered that her mind was revelling in this new and daily companionship, she wondered it had survived that long period of loneliness to which she had condemned it. Styr was essentially a man's woman. If her brain accepted a mate at all, it must be a man's. Had she

made intimates among her own sex, they would quickly have been reduced to satellites or enemies.

And now, for the first time, her brain had found a mate, a fact the more wonderful and beatific because it was the one glory of which she had never dreamed even in those days when she took refuge in dreams. She determined to forge a deep and mysterious bond with the ego of this man, whom, had she been fifteen years younger and unblackened by life, she fancied she might have loved and married. She had had everything else; now she would have only the highest.

At first she could hardly formulate her wants, for the spiritual desires are very elusive, especially when the brain is fed. Indeed, the line between the mental and the spiritual desires is so fine that the spirit, the soul, is, no doubt, merely the brain raised to a higher and more intense degree both of desire and expression; it has its most comprehensible illustration in the exalted pitch it sometimes reaches under the influence of music, of Nature in the major mood, the account of some stirring and heroical deed. In other words, the soul is the brain in its best moments, when most nearly free of the flesh. It may be that these moments illuminate for a second the misty horizon which obscures the walls of death.

Fortunately there were few if any homely details to dissipate the magic halo flung around this relationship. After all, Ordham had no real rights, no authority, save such as she tacitly granted him. Her cook was a personage of variety and attainments; her household ran on wheels oiled and invisible; society, with its trivial and levelling interruptions, was away; the ugly adder of money could never rear its head between them. If ever the opportunity was granted a woman to snatch a poem out of the vast prose heap of life, it was Margarethe's, and she had never at any time been the woman to oppose a desire that assailed her in full strength. She would have been the first to make it clear that if she had "reformed," it was because she had outgrown the lower offerings of her nature and found the higher more interesting and satisfying.

Ordham realized sharply enough later that if he did not love her at this time it was because she pressed down the eyelids of his drowsy passions, his indolent senses; but as the weeks passed he vaguely understood that he was happy, and that only her insistent spurring made him stick to his studies and prepare for a future in which at times he quite lost interest, so perfect was the present. Styr had resisted the demoniacal teasings of her vanity, but she had no intention of denying it rights both natural and harmless; and being a woman as well versed in man as Mercator in the surfaces of Earth, she knew exactly how far to go, when to dazzle and allure him with glimpses of the hidden treasures in both their natures. To have been always merely the good comrade, sexless, the artist dwelling in regions remote from the common interests of life, would have been as fatal as to have laid down all her arms with a sigh and confessed herself the eternal woman. There were times when they quarrelled violently; and, indeed, being mistress of many moods, and not sparing in the use of them, she gave him no opportunity to tire of her and long for the wide circle in which he had hitherto fed his love of variety. She even made him accept an occasional invitation to a castle, and they took many little excursions into the country, where they read and talked and fell silent under the trees of the woods, or on the shores of some lake with a chain of Alps glittering in the distance. For the purposes of a romantic friendship Bavaria is unexcelled!

But if Ordham, owing to his languid temperament and overdeveloped mind, was immature in character and torpid in those recesses of his masculinity inaccessible to any currents not sent out by the heart, he was by no means blind. Although too indolent and too content to analyze deeply, even as time went on, there were moments, generally as he sat by his window at midnight, or loitered up the Isar in the small hours, when he speculated upon the possibility of falling in love with this woman, when his mind was even briefly lit up with the suspicion that he would love her now, were she not so supremely indifferent to the unwilling fascination he had exercised over some other women. But

while in other circumstances this fact alone might have piqued his vanity into storming that citadel prisoning all the mysteries of her sex, by this time he was quite determined to marry between his examinations and his first diplomatic appointment; and the mere thought of a love affair with Margarethe Styr, rousing him to his depths as it must, and absorbing every faculty, filled him with terror. She must always be in his life; no girl and her millions should interfere for a moment with this wonderful relationship he had established with the most wonderful of women; but to love her would mean hurricanes and earthquakes in his inner life, whose mere vision not only alarmed the lotus eater in him, but cast an ominous cloud of warning over his future. He might forget it at times, but more and more the uneasy sense of the necessity to provide for that future before it was too late recurred to him under the renewed if gentle manipulation of his mother.

Once he went so far as to resolve that if he detected a disposition on her part to deepen their intimacy, he should leave for England by the next train. This resolution took form one Sunday afternoon when he was returning from a visit to Princess Nachmeister, established for a few weeks in her castle, splendidly poised above lake and woods in the Alps of Tyrol. There had been a large house party, and he had felt frivolous and worldly and irresponsible, in all respects much as he had felt before he met the woman with whom he had found so many more resources than he had dreamed existed in human intercourse. Nachmeister had made a lion of him, had informed her guests, among whom were dignitaries of state, that he was the cleverest young man in Europe, and certain of wielding the baton in the diplomatic orchestra during her lifetime. He was fancying himself mightily.

Nevertheless, he went at once to the villa by the Isar, for he never broke an appointment with its châtelaine. He found Styr in a villanous temper. She had received a late summons to sing in the Hof at midnight for the King. When she unceremoniously turned him out, he was glad to go, and wondered that he could have apprehended senti-

ment in this sullen, angry, almost ugly woman, who, after a separation of nearly three days, had scarcely a word for him. She had communicated with him in whispers, which forced his own voice down to the same artificial register, and made him feel as absurd as, no doubt, he looked.

"Good-by," she had whispered in the hall, where he happened to have met her (he had his own gate key); "come to-morrow. I am in the right frame of mind to sing Kundry! I shall pinch Parsifal when I get him under my mantle, and he won't dare scream. The idea of commanding a performance of *Parsifal* in this weather!"

"Oh, well," he whispered back consolingly, "you haven't sung for a month, and your voice might get rusty."

"Go away."

As Ordham, half an hour later, strolled up the Maximilianstrasse, admiring the brown fairy-like palace on its terraces at the end of the perspective (which always looked to him as if it might have been dreamed by some homesick Italian poet), he was pricked by a sudden longing to go and call on a girl. He cared little for girls as a rule, and was well content to be approved by women of the world; but, after all, he was very young, and the mere youth in him moved restlessly now and again as if with an unappeased, if intermittent, hunger. At Princess Nachmeister's castle he had flirted with three or four charming married women, and upon his return he had hastened to the side of the mortal he liked best on earth. But — well — he would have loved an hour of nonsense, a game of tennis, a gay meaningless flirtation with an innocent light-headed and extravagantly pretty girl. He wondered if the youth in him would last much longer. Had not Styr petted and spoilt him when the mood took her he should have felt quite forty. And he would have enjoyed that extraordinary friendship the more for the occasional relief of a shallow but charming girl. But girls in Munich were as scarce as praise from his Lutz. The thought of her was like a sudden bracing wind out of the northeast. At least he was making progress under her lash that would enable him to face the board of examiners before the end of the

XXV

FRIENDSHIP AT FOUR IN THE MORNING

On the following day, Styr, who had never been more gracious, asked him if he would walk with her in the park next morning at four of the clock. For a moment he felt so blank that his mouth stood ajar; but not only had he grown accustomed to fall in with her plans, but he had an immediate vision of himself and the heroine of his romantic friendship alone in the vast solitudes of the Englischergarten, and assented with enthusiasm. Margarethe, when not out of temper (when he, too, could be very sulky and obstinate), never failed to carry him whither she listed; but this mere tantalizing of the natural romance of youth was to breed results of which Styr, far-sighted as she commonly was, had no presentiment.

He went to bed at nine o'clock, an event that had not occurred within his memory. On the following morning at three he fumbled into his clothes under the impression that he was a somnambulist, and wished between prodigious yawns that Frau von Tann had chosen to explore the mysteries of the Englischergarten by moonlight. But when his gloomy servant, who had been ordered to rouse him, brought him a cup of strong coffee, his wits quickened. Further encouraged by the waiting *droschke*, in whose appearance he had placed little faith, he repaired to the Schwabing bridge in the proper frame of mind to meet a dark-browed woman muffled in a long white cloak and with a white veil floating about her head.

She led him with shining eyes past the lake with its sleeping swans, past the sweetly smelling fields, through silences as of untrodden mountain tops. The stars were

nmer with few misgivings. He also had taken up French
in, and he delved for two hours a day in the other lores
scribed by the guardians of the diplomatic service; so
t after all the time left at his disposal for regrets and
lysis was limited.

crowding one another out of the deep cold blue of the sky; from the earth rose strange subtle perfumes which made him blush for his decadent Roman love of artificial scents; the shadows were dark on the open reaches; distant trees stood out black and sharp; the woods seemed huddled together; even the Isar crawled silently in its sleep.

Suddenly Styr flung out her hands, the palms upturned to the flickering sky. She looked like a priestess about to chant her pæan to the gods. Off the stage she had never appealed so directly to that artistic and sensuous side of his nature he had assiduously cultivated, and he gazed at her, stirred by a formless but eager sense of expectation which he did not comprehend until long after. He did not even attempt to formulate the wish that she were a goddess and himself a god, and that they had floated to a plane where no sound stirred but the music of Wagner; but as she turned her head and her eyes met his, she looked so young, and at the same time so different from all women, that involuntarily he moved a step forward.

"Oh!" she cried. "Do you know that this is the very first time in my life that I have known — lived — romance? Romance! The mere word is wonderful. During all the years of my youth I did not even believe in its existence. To think that once I was sixteen — twenty — twenty-eight — the ideal age — and that I never once glanced over the wall into the lovely mysterious gardens of other women's youth! It is incredible that I never at least dreamed of — anticipated it."

"But if it has come — what matter?"

"No, it does not matter. But oh, poor poets! poor psychologists! That I can drink this full cup of romance without finding the commonplace dregs of love at the bottom! All the other senses and appreciations are intensified, instead of being submerged, as when one is surrendering ignominiously to the race. I feel that I have attained heights that other women, silly victims that most of them are, have not even the power to imagine. My hands are in the secret caskets of life, and all the jewels are mine! *mine!*"

She looked so triumphant, so wholly beautiful, so like Isolde, that the colour mounted to his face, although she frightened him a little, and he wished he were ten years older. But she never gave him time to feel that he was not rising to the occasion (although this agonizing sensation visited him occasionally in the retrospect), any more than she ever permitted an electrified moment to prolong itself until it had kindled fire. She came down to earth abruptly.

"Let us walk faster. I want to walk in the woods, and if we loiter we shall take cold."

But as they entered those dim glades which might have been the depths of remote forests, he asked abruptly, "Am I your lover?"

"Yes — in a new fashion!" She spoke gayly. "It is a sort of mental marriage. Are you content?" She looked at him with the humorous flash in her eyes which always lit up the breach between their ages.

"I think it is rather odd that I am, you know. I must be as cold as a fish — or else that woman I told you about so put me off — "

"Well, don't put your good fortune under a microscope. Be grateful that when you do awaken you will have preserved the freshness of youth to give zest and charm to the energy of maturity."

"Suppose I never do awaken."

"You will. For long I wondered why you had so many of the qualifications as well as something of the temperament of genius, without any one of the creative gifts. But I have come to the conclusion that you have a very rare gift — that of the supreme lover."

"I?"

"It will wake up in due course, that genius of yours — oh, yes."

"And why not for you?" He was still conscious of no desire to touch her, but what man could resist flirtation in such surroundings?

"Because neither of us wishes it. We have a perfect thing. Why shatter it? When you cross that dark thresh-

old, you never know! If I were fifteen years younger and of your own world — "

"You would not be you. I don't know — I have a feeling — a presentiment — that one day I shall love you. I sometimes have a vision of myself ten years older living with you in Venice." He spoke with sudden energy. "I am certain it will come to pass."

"Venice smells so dreadfully. I had no idea you were given to romantic musings."

"I am not. It is, as I said, a sort of fleeting vision, a presentiment. I know that you will always be in my life; and naturally I see you where one can command the greatest seclusion. I do not picture myself wholly your lover, but I always see you quite alone with me — when I am older, and, somehow, different."

"Well, remember that I too shall be older," she replied with mock sadness. "By that time, no doubt, Wagner will have ground my voice to powder, and I shall be playing Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, or introducing Ibsen to London and New York."

She had succeeded in diverting him. "Ah! you would go to America — you intend to go there some day?"

"Long before my voice has gone, I hope. If I could create a furore in London I should not hesitate to go to New York at once. And — after all — it is my own city; as much mine as if I had been born there, for I went so young. The hatred I felt for it when I left has fled — with the memory of other things; I dream of it now sometimes, and love every stone of it. One can never continue to hate one's own city, which must always stand out in the memory as one's best friend. Besides, when you look down upon the world — Society — from one of its own pedestals, nothing matters; no one can hurt you."

"Would any one try to hurt you?" he asked anxiously. "Do you fear any one now?"

"Not here. But if I went to the land of the free to interpret an unpopular master unprotected by personal fame, — *which, in* American eyes, only London can give,

and only New York set the final seal upon, — I should be hounded into the Hudson River."

An intonation started him upon a fresh tack. "Did you ever think of self-destruction?"

"More than once. No doubt you have yourself. But because you are young and temperamental. I contemplated putting an end to myself for no such poetic reasons. There were more reasons than one, and generally it was the intense vitality of my mind that deterred me, perhaps an insolent sense of power that would not permit me to lose in the game with life. Now and again, I loved too much — what I then called love; but the reflection that no man was worth the sacrifice restored my cynicism, and cynicism is fatal to that intensity of egoism which counsels annihilation. Strange to think that I once was hard and cynical!"

"At least you might tell me something of your love attacks." He continued artfully, "I shall never feel really in your confidence until you do."

"Love affairs of that sort are too commonplace to remember. At first I loved once or twice out of mere youth and racial instinct. But I soon got over that. The great affair? Well, he was the conventional hero, fashioned by satirical Nature for the crudity of youth. He was handsome — but handsome! — brilliant, charming, above all, inconstant — the sort of man that keeps a woman questioning, 'Will he come?' Such a man would only incite me to amusement to-day; no type is so ingenuous. But then — well, I tried to kill him one day. He was too quick and too strong for me. I was spared the vulgarity of a newspaper scandal; even a whisper of the attempt never passed my threshold; I took good care that it should not. The mere vision of half a column of headlines with my name in letters as black as Pluto did as much later on to extinguish my love as my separation from the man — I never saw him after. But I had been possessed with the lust to kill, to annihilate, to whirl him and myself out of life. And it was long before that rage, which included everybody and everything on earth, subsided. But at last

I came to my senses. And — who knows? — all my life seems to have been but a schooling for my art."

"Then you regret nothing?"

"I waste no time in futilities, and there is nothing of the Magdalene in my composition."

"What would you have done if you had not discovered your voice?"

"No doubt I should have discovered in time that I was an actress. Had it not been for that smouldering mental fire in me which always seemed to whisper, 'Wait! wait!' I should have become the most famous courtesan of modern times. I had it in me! There were intervals when Cora Pearl inspired me with envy. It was mere instinct — rather the watch-fires of genius — that led me to shun the public eye, even when on the stage."

"You would have been a horrible woman if you had chosen to go that pace!" he exclaimed, with a sudden access of vision. "You had it in you to become all bad."

"All."

"Was art your only hope? Suppose you had loved the right sort of man?"

"Such women don't love the right sort of man. They are born off the key, and they do not meet the men to inspire them with ideals. Nor women either. Besides, after that I never wished to love again. The only good thing about love is the getting over it. Good God!" She flung out her hands again. "The delight of that recovery, the sense of freedom, the intoxicating liberty! Love to women of my nature is a hideous slavery, the sooner we become flint the better. Leave love for the conservators of the race. But enough of such black subjects this beautiful morning. The sun climbed the Alps while we were in the woods, and the stars have gone out. Let us return. I have a make-up for you! After breakfast I shall take a photograph — but it will flatter you!"

Some time before she had taught him how to use her camera, and he had taken a series of photographs of her in the costumes and attitudes of her various rôles. Thus it happens that to-day Bridgminster is the only person

living who can recall Styr without the aid of memory, for even in London, when she realized the half of her supreme ambition, she would not be photographed for the public. And as Ordham, in spite of his laziness, could do most things well that he gave his mind to, these photographs, some twenty in number, are not only admirable specimens of the amateur's art, but such approximate presentments of Styr that it is to be hoped they will yet find their way into a public gallery.

She let him sleep for two hours after breakfast, then sending for him to come to her in the garden, dressed him in a flowing wig, a velvet jacket, a low soft collar, and wandering scarf. Then she stood off.

"Pout out your lips. Make your eyes heavy with sullen dreams. There! You are Rossetti at nineteen. You look as if about to die of a rose in aromatic pain. How have you escaped the æsthetic craze, at the very least?"

"I don't think that I have. Only whereas they think they can do things, I know that I cannot, and do not propose to make myself ridiculous to no end. Please hurry. This wig is very warm."

He sent the photograph later to his mother, and it left her breathless for quite a moment. As much as she could fall in love with any man, she had fallen in love with Rossetti. At least he had haunted her girlish dreams, and perhaps those of her early married life until the world absorbed her. Of course she had never seen him in his beautiful youth; and to him — then deeply in love with Elizabeth Siddal — she had been nothing more than an interesting sitter whom her august papa had not too graciously allowed him to paint. But stranger things than that have happened in Nature's workshop.

XXVI

FRIENDSHIP IN A BORROWED FRAME

THE King suffered from toothache. Detesting dentists, and knowing from bitter experience that it would endure until the nerve died, he indifferently granted Styr's request for a month's leave of absence. Chaperoned by Fräulein Lutz, she and Ordham went on what they called a walking tour in the Bavarian Alps. Travelling third class, both for the picturesque companionship it afforded and to escape awkward rencounters, they took the train from village to village, and spent several hours of each day leisurely climbing, driving, wandering in the woods, or floating on the brilliant waters, as deeply toned as emerald or sapphire, of Alpine lakes. Avoiding hotels, they lodged on the outskirts of their villages, and Lutz went to market every morning. They took no servants with them, and nothing could exceed Ordham's devotion in carrying wraps and ordering carriages. But this, they were not long discovering, was the limit of his usefulness. Either Styr or the chaperon bought the tickets, found the porters, engaged the rooms, bargained with guides, ordered the meals, made out the routes, and asked all necessary questions. On the morning after their arrival in Oberammergau, Fräulein Lutz almost burst into Styr's bedroom.

"Mein Gott!" she exclaimed. "But I have just prepared his bath! But I, Hiobe Lutz! This is the climax. I met him wandering in the hall with his eyes half opened and seeming to look for something he could not find. He wore a pink dressing-gown with green facings, and his bare feet were not even in slippers. I asked him if he were ill. *He said, No,* that he had no bath. It never

occurred to him to walk downstairs and ask for his tub, nor even to call out of the window. But he looked so helpless, so *young*, that I — Himmel! — I ran downstairs and found for that giant baby his tub, which had been put in the shed. Then, accompanied by the daughter of the house, I carried it up to his room — then returned again with jugs of water, hot and cold! He thanked us 'so much.' Oh, he has the prettiest manners. They never fail. But myself, I shall have to cross the English Channel and pass those examinations for him."

"You know you are devoted to him."

"What is it?" asked Lutz with sudden suspicion. "Can it be this hypnotism they talk about?"

"Charm comes from the same root, I fancy. And then he really is helpless. How can people, even the rich and great, bring up a boy like that?"

Lutz nodded in sage disgust. "The aristocracy! Ach Gott! What will become of them when the next French Revolution, so to speak, comes? How they must have suffered, those poor pampered things! It was not the fear of death. That was nothing. Race can always meet downfall and death with an air — an air that sustains them within as without. But before the scaffold! When they had to dress, to wait on themselves! — to think! Ah, that was the tragedy. I feel sorry for these poor helpless aristocrats; but no, I would not abolish the institution, because it gives to us humble bourgeois the savour that Europe furnishes for America! So, when I saw that poor helpless boy — who can talk like his grandfather — ach! I cannot understand him. He is made up of too many parts, contradictions, for my old brain. On the whole, I should like to spank him."

Styr laughed and put the finishing touches to her costume of brown linen, which looked simple and bucolic, but had been cut in Paris, and, with a hat and veil as soft and rich in their shading as a pheasant's wing, was no less artistic and becoming than the white frocks she put on for supper. A few moments later Ordham entered their common sitting room, fresh, smiling, unconscious of the com-

ment he had inspired. He had quite forgotten the episode of the bath.

He shook hands with Countess Tann and Fräulein Lutz in his usual formal manner, his eyes beaming with pleasure as they always did upon entering the presence of his chosen friend, unless something had happened to put him out of temper. As he was so much more amiable and happy even than usual this morning, Styr suddenly understood how he must have missed his servant, although he had never referred to the man. He was feeling pleasantly cared for once more, even if he had ungratefully forgotten the author of his well-being. No doubt the warm water for his bath had often failed to appear, and he had none of the national mania for "cold tubs." From this time forth, until he was safely deposited in the Legation once more, Lutz grimly made a nurse of herself. She not only saw to his bath, but she packed and unpacked his trunk, and discovering that many objects were mateless, divorced, of course, in the laundry, she wrote to Hines for a new supply. He accepted all these attentions with the most charming courtesy, but his lack of emphasis amused Styr, although poor Lutz took his polite acquiescence in her devotions as a matter of course.

Upon this morning he went at once out upon the little balcony where they were to breakfast, and murmured his delight, calling Styr to join him with an imperious motion of his head. They had arrived after dark and seen little of the long straggling village on the bank of its narrow stream. Their lodging was at the very end of the street, where the road branches to Ettal, and from the balcony they could see the romantic winding village in the narrow valley, above which towered a peak surmounted by a cross. There were mills with great wheels on the river, dilapidated bridges, peasants in costume, the usual church with its domed steeple high on its terrace, and surrounded by tombs. Even the roofs of the houses were picturesque, the women working in the narrow fields. On all sides, covering the mountains, was the forest, and over all a peace indescribable.

As they had brought their own coffee, and fruit was abundant, they enjoyed their breakfast even if the bread was sour and the butter ill-made; luxuries they had dismissed from their minds. When it was over, leaving Lutz to consult with their hostess, Margarethe and Ordham strolled through the village. Oberammergau resembled many other Bavarian and Tyrolean villages up to a certain point, and then its individuality began. On the plastered façades of the pointed houses were beautiful religious frescoes as soft and mellow as those of Ghirlandino, and in the church, larger and more graceful than many, were two hideous bedizened skeletons of saints. Protected by glass, and gorgeously arrayed, their awful skulls and hands, chemically preserved, seemed to cry out for the last act of death, which would grant them the dust and oblivion of the grave. The church was half full of men and women, dropped in for a casual prayer, and all dressed in the picturesque garb of Ober-Bayern, so rare these few years later.

Even the people of this village of the Passion Play are different from those of other villages. Bavarian peasants are kindly, but these of Oberammergau have an exquisite and unfailing courtesy, and every child greets the stranger with "*Grüss Gott*," and runs to kiss his hand. Although it would be several years before the next performance of the Passion Play, many of the men wore their hair long, for a religious drama of some sort is given every year. The very expression of these people indicated a superiority of intelligence and character. All hoped to be chosen, or rechosen, for the next great performance; and few in that village, where the light was as searching as ever was turned upon a throne, but cultivated the best that was in him. It is probably the only spot on Earth where Christianity is a working success.

Ordham and Margarethe lingered at the windows of the shops, admiring the wood carving, and bought a number of crucifixes and religious groups for the servants at home. Finally, they sat down at a table outside one of the cafés, where the Christus of the last performance, who looked as *much like* Christ as any mortal can, was drinking beer

and eating a large piece of black bread and Swiss cheese. Our friends listened for a few moments to his animated discussion with a neighbour upon the utility of damming the river, that it might do more good in summer and less harm in winter. When he had finished his repast he rose, bowed profoundly to the strangers, and sauntered off, followed by a troop of children that all hoped to be Christuses in their turn.

"I should think it must be a terrible strain," said Ordham. "Surely human nature must break out occasionally."

"No doubt it does. But these people are saturated with the spirit of the Passion Play, and so have their ancestors been before them — for three hundred years. They are not only moral but happy. The first time I came here, one young woman, whose histrionic talent was remarkable, told me that she had refused two offers from Berlin managers because life would be a blank to her if she could not look out of her window every morning and see the cross on Kochel. This is the only community in the world which is consistent generation in and out to a high ideal."

"I wonder if it is a haven of rest to outsiders," said Ordham, who was staring at her after his habit, his cigarette cold. "Could you come here if your voice failed you; if, for any reason, you could not act — come here and find peace?"

Margarethe shook her head. "For a week — a fortnight. Then I should fly to the very centres of distraction. This peace is not for the outsider. It is not sold in the shops with the crucifixes. It takes generations to make. Even if one brought here a peaceful, even a religious, mind, one would never feel quite the real thing. And yet I do not believe there is a self-righteous person in Oberammergau. Alas! Our tête-à-tête is over. Here comes your grenadier."

Ordham hastily lit a cigarette as his Lutz strode up, exclaiming: "Did you think to escape your lesson? We shall have it here. It shall be conversation and dictation."

"The morning is so beautiful — you are going away?" Margarethe was opening her parasol.

"But yes," said Lutz severely. "Is her place here, to distract *your sufficiently frivolous* mind? Ask me a question."

"Do you prefer chocolate or coffee?" he aske ingratiatingly.

"Chocolate, with thanks. But we are no longer in th Ollendorff stage or you would not be returning next mon to England to face your destiny. I have thought of te terrible questions, than which they can construct nothin more difficult, more ridiculous. I have brought pencil an paper. Write, while I drink the excellent chocolate."

And Ordham groaned and resigned himself.

If Lutz was inexorable in her own province she was a irreproachable chaperon. They saw little of her save meals, and wandered in the woods, or, here in Oberamme gau, sat for hours beside the cross, high on Kochel, indul ing in those long silences where ego's wing-tips graze on another now and again. Often Ordham went frankly sleep, and Styr forgot him, and dreamed of conquests London and New York, such as Patti herself had nev wrung from those blasé publics.

They went on to Berchtesgaden, that strange tumble mass of peaks and ledges and rocky walls, with its bit valley, its castle, its village dotted all over the scenery cannot escape. They climbed to the glacier, explored th salt mine, and spent hours on the great green lake, Köni see; which looks as if a mountain had been sliced throug its middle, the high walls thrust apart, and waters, fro some dark and sinister depths of Earth, depths where sh prepared her demoniacal schemes to blast surfaces dear man, had risen and covered the floor of the gorge. It is wild primeval landscape, suggestive of centuries of co vulsions, perhaps that the end is not yet. But if the mou tains were terrible, the lake gloomy, the monastery in th tiny valley was peaceful, and when they climbed into th recesses of these volcanic masses, they found the peasant in the little dairy huts, very hospitable and friendly. Bu once, when they went out by moonlight, quite alone o the lake, the great dark expanse between its bare and me acing walls filled them with terror, and they took hand and ran home like children.

XXVII

ADIEU TO THE ISAR

ALL things end, and the day after their return to Munich he appeared at the villa with a very long face.

"I leave to-night for England," he groaned, flinging himself on the divan. "This morning I received a notice that the examinations will begin next Monday. I did not read the reason. The fact was enough."

"Desolation!" Styr sat down abruptly, but she kept all sentiment out of her voice. "What in heaven's name am I to do without you?"

"I wish I could think that you felt half as badly as I do. But while I go to untold horrors, you go on a tour to win new laurels."

"Yes, in hot German cities and hotter concert rooms. And my *Gastspiel* does not begin until the 25th of August; but I find invitations from Switzerland — Zurich, Geneva, Lucerne. I shall accept them if the King consents. Yes, — I have work — but still! Well, you would have gone soon in any case."

"I shall return the moment this beastly business is over and I have seen Bridg."

"But as soon as you pass you are in the service — you must work in the Foreign Office for six months, and then you will be appointed, no doubt far from Munich."

"I shall get a three months' leave. Influence may not be able to get a man into the service, but it will do much later. I shall go when and where I wish. I am determined to spend the autumn in Munich. There will be that much more, at least. How in heaven's name shall I ever get on without you?"

"Do not protest too much." Styr had no belief that he would fly back to her, and once more was thankful that she had remade herself. She should miss him, but it would have been the last straw did she still retain the capacity to miss any man too much. She added dutifully: "Besides, I want you to marry."

He kicked about among the cushions. "That, at least, you need not remind me of. But if I do, I shall come here on my honeymoon."

"You might leave her behind."

"I wish to heaven I could. Why not perfect these commercial marriages? If I give the girl the position of a married woman, which they all appear to be dying for, the prospect of a title, and the advantages of my mother's protection in London, she might at least give me my complete liberty."

"And her money."

"Of course."

"And you would come back to Munich and lie on my divan! You are fast nibbling through the icing of what Excellenz calls the big black cake of life, my friend, and must now look forward to an attack or two of indigestion. I have a presentiment that you will not come back to Munich until it has made you quite ill. Then, indeed, you will want consolation. I wonder how different you will be?"

He turned upon her large anxious eyes. "Do you really believe I shall have to go through the mill like other men? I should go to pieces! The only thing I can think of that I shouldn't funk if it came to the point would be war. I shouldn't hate that, although, no doubt, it would be dirty and uncomfortable. But the trials of life, petty and big! I hate the very thought of them, but I shall have them, of course — a few, anyhow. But I shall always come to you for consolation — always! Promise that no one shall take my place in the very slightest degree, that you will never have another intimate friend."

"That is easy to promise. Do not permit your mind to boil with jealousy."

"It will." He looked as placid as a lake. "But no

matter what comes, I can always conjure up this room — this room! Oh, I cannot leave it! I hate the Civil Service Commission! I hate the diplomatic service! I hate my creditors! I hate matrimony! And I hate my brother most of all."

"You will feel much better after dinner. Come, it is ready."

He remained with her until his servant came to fetch him for the night train. As he took her hand at parting his boyishness vanished, and his manner was a mixture of formality and sincere regret. "Good-by," he said. "I wish this summer might have lasted forever. You have made it the most wonderful experience I shall ever have, and you will always be the most wonderful woman in the world to me."

They were standing in the hall, before the open door. He suddenly smiled into her eyes with an expression that was not unlike a kiss. Then he shook hands with her once more and went out to his cab.

For the first few days she did not miss him at all; once more there was novelty in loneliness and freedom. When she did begin to miss him, she found a certain exhilaration in a sensation that was also a novelty. Then the King, still nursing his tooth, and always kindly, gave her another leave of absence, and she went to Switzerland.

XXVIII

A ROSSETTI

NOTHING, save, possibly, a voluntary check from his brother, could have surprised Ordham more than the information that he had passed his examinations. With the optimism, not inherent, but veneered upon his mind by a too fortunate life, he had, up to the moment of his arrival, taken his success in this ordeal for granted; perhaps it is fairer to state that he saw himself always, when prefiguring his future, as an ambassador in Paris or St. Petersburg; but no sooner did he find himself at the entrance to those forbidding straits which he must traverse to find the sole agency for his talents, than he descended into the depths of black despair. He would not pass. How could he? His French was good, for he had talked it in the nursery, and it had been actively exercised in Paris. But he had barely brushed up his Latin. He should forget every date — of course! And how could any man remember a mass of stuff it had taken Mill and Smith a lifetime to grind out? And German! They laid as much stress upon it as if England meditated immediate occupation of middle and southeastern Europe. They would treat him like a witness at a murder trial. How he hated that hideous language — and how could he have been so fatuous as to imagine that he could accumulate the necessary amount in less than a year? — the greater part of which he had wasted. For once in his life he knew remorse, repentance, wished that he had a will of iron, and had exercised it during that delightful sojourn in Munich. It shamed him to reflect that what little he did know he owed to the interest of one woman and the determined pounding of another.

He appeared before the board of examiners, pale, dejected, resigned, with no crest whatever, and impressed that formidable body as being at least a modest youth, high-bred and dignified, who would not be rejected for personal reasons did he survive the mental ordeal — a finale which sometimes surprised the cock-sure aspirant for diplomatic honours.

And he had passed! Not brilliantly, but he was launched upon the diplomatic sea, and he had no apprehension, with his immense family influence and the talents he was beginning to appreciate, of foundering. For a few moments he felt an inclination to be wildly jubilant. But this he sternly repressed, shrugged his shoulders, and reminded himself that such a commonplace achievement was to be expected of any man who had brains instead of porridge in his skull. To this succeeded an hour of irritation and disgust that he had not distinguished himself, put his rival competitors to the blush, made them wish he had forborne to enter the lists. But he was generous and philosophical, and this mood also passed. He wrote a note to Lord Bridgminster, and sent telegrams to Countess Tann, Princess Nachmeister, Fräulein Lutz, and his mother. Then he felt that he might dismiss the tiresome matter from his mind, as well as the harrowing ordeal that awaited him in the north, and settle down to the enjoyment of such plays as the month of August afforded.

He found the English drama and its interpretations tame and trite after those highly seasoned performances of the Continent with what were practically whole star casts, but they were better than visiting political country houses with his mother; and he slept late, strolled up and down Piccadilly, and wrote daily notes to Margarethe Styr, whom he missed quite as much as he had anticipated. It would have been interesting to abuse the play with her and drive out into the cool green English country every afternoon. He consoled himself by reading several new books he had not heard of while abroad, and sending them to her with colloquial ramblings on the fly-leaves. It was very cool and pleasant in his mother's little house in Chesterfield

Street, where hitherto he had passed but a night or two during hasty visits from Paris. He had been little in England since Lady Bridgminster, shorn of her power, had departed out of Bridgminster House in St. James's Square, and made a nest for herself on the income of a dowager supplemented by a small annual allowance from her tight-fisted papa, and occasional checks from the duchess; the latter assisting her to enjoy life after a fashion and contract new debts.

Ordham had always been vaguely sorry for his mother, and his examination of the little house, this first time he was alone in it, deepened and somewhat clarified his sympathy. It seemed to him that she had just missed everything. She had almost been a great beauty, but although the general effect she managed to achieve, still made people, particularly in a ballroom, turn and stare at her, a closer inspection found the face, in spite of its large blue eyes, almost insignificant. If not born with a consuming desire for individual recognition, she had planted the ambition early in life, and consistently cultivated it. But although a feature in London society, she was not a personality, and there is a vast difference. Even her position in the political world, towering as it had been, she owed to her husband, brilliant, fascinating, and one of the chiefs of his party, as well as to the superb entertainments his income permitted her to give in St. James's Square and Yorkshire. She had facility of speech, of pen, in all *les graces;* but she was devoid of originality, and almost stopped short of being clever. Distinguished in manner, she was deficient in charm and made no slaves. With a sincere love of beauty, she lacked the eye which corresponds to ear in music, and there was always a want of harmony in the detail of both her dress and her rooms. Worldly by birth and training, she was bohemian (of a sort) by instinct, and even when in Bridgminster House had mixed her parties in a fashion which society, less anxious to be amused at any cost than it became a few years later, condemned; and although nothing but indiscretions of *which she was* incapable could deprive her of the great

position to which she had been born, and had held no less through her long period as a political hostess than her immense and powerful connection, she was now merely the faddish daughter of one peer and widow of another, instead of the personal force she still so ardently desired to be.

Even the pretty little house (for which, of course, she paid an exorbitant rent) lacked the individuality to which its rich collection of blue china and hawthorn jars, Chippendale and old oak furniture, fine brasses, antique vases, and Venetian mirrors, bits of Italian tapestry and stained glass, entitled it. The drawing-room, unexpectedly large, like so many of the drawing-rooms in those little houses in Mayfair, should have been a memorial sonnet to Rossetti, and it looked like the embodiment of his first incoherent dreams when groping for the formulæ of the new art-religion. At the end of this room was the famous portrait which Rossetti had painted at his own request. He had seen the young girl at the opera and thought her the living embodiment of Beatrice. One of his few patrons had been able to persuade the duke that the fashionably obscure artist was a genius, but more because he would disdain payment than because of any enthusiasm inspired by pictures which the duke thought as stiff and outlandish as those ridiculous formal gardens about Ordham Castle. He was a Briton to his marrow, was his Grace, and he carried his detestation of all things foreign to such an extent that he had never paid a second visit to the Continent nor to any of those country houses which kept green the memories of Palladio and Inigo Jones. But his daughter, who had also gone to the patron's house to see "the Rossettis," had conceived an immediate passion for the new school, and sweetly gave her father no peace until he consented to let the artist paint her. The duke yielded with the utmost ungraciousness, and stipulated that the man — what was his name? — was to charge nothing for the honour, and was to present the portrait to Lady Patricia at once — there should be no public exhibition. As Rossetti never exhibited, and asked for nothing but the

joy of painting this Renaissance lady who might have served as the original inspiration of the Brotherhood, he agreed to anything and eagerly awaited the day appointed for the first sitting.

She had not entered his studio and removed her bonnet before he saw the mistake he had made. Here was no Beata Beatrix, no mediæval saint, no about-to-be-murdered spouse of a sixteenth-century Italian, haunting immense and gloomy chambers, but an excessively thin narrow young English girl almost six feet in height, with a little white face of no particular character, immense blue eyes without a particle of expression, and an extraordinary mass of pale golden hair, which stood out from her head like wings. But Rossetti was an artist. If his spirits went down to zero, it was not long before they ascended with a rush. At least here was material to work on; that hair, that poise of head, that aristocratic languor were no delusion, and he could conjure up his first impression of her and the dreams of beauty which had haunted him ever since. In short, he idealized her, and the long picture (which had been exhibited to all London society for twenty-five years) was one of the most characteristic things he had ever done, and, perhaps, had contributed as much as any cause to Lady Bridgminster's fatal desire to express so much more than she could conceive. Against a background of dull blue tapestry, with full throat strained, the jaw line from chin to ear salient, with lids slowly drooping, hair that seemed to be an aura emanating from the pure young fires of her spirit, stood this vision in diaphanous white clasping against her angelic flatness an upright sheaf of Annunciation lilies. The thinness was the willow grace of a reed, the pale complexion the white symbol of maidenly exaltation; the half-opened eyes, as blue as an Italian lake, were looking straight into paradise. When this wonderful picture was finished and had been admired by the artists that worshipped at his shrine, Rossetti, with his tongue in his cheek, covered the hands and arms with tan-coloured suède gloves. In that touch, done *perhaps*, in a moment of unconscious foresight, as of

deliberate sarcasm, Rossetti had epitomized the life of Lady Bridgminster.

He had intended to make many sketches of her during these sittings, but she inspired him no further, as much to her disappointment as to his. Nevertheless, he liked her well enough, and went to her house after she married Bridgminster as long as he went anywhere. He had no reason to regret the acquaintance, for she bought several of his pictures, patronized the entire Brotherhood, was one of the first to acknowledge the genius of Burne-Jones, and commissioned the greatest decorator of modern times to refurnish the state drawing-rooms of Ordham in the style of the Italian Renaissance.

Lady Bridgminster was superstitious about this picture, and, when moving from palace to hovel, to use her own expression, took it with her, refusing the offer of the new millionnaire to whom her step-son had unaccountably leased the splendid theatre of her triumphs. Not only did it remind her, that in spite of six sons and what she regarded as a lifetime of disappointments, she had once been young and romantic like other women, but she had a fancy that it was her real self, and that did she let it go out of her keeping she should become but a grey shadow flitting amongst people who never could be quite sure whether she were there or not. This was her one imaginative flight, and she cherished it.

"Lady Pat" was little broader and even less covered with flesh than when the picture was painted a quarter of a century ago. How she had ever contrived to produce six strapping boys was one of those mysteries which Nature will explain one day, no doubt, with other paradoxes. But they had cost her few pains, and nurses and tutors had brought, were bringing, them up. At Ordham Castle, where they had lived the year round, until the older boys went to school and the father's death consigned the younger to the dower house in Kent, she had complained of their noise, but as a matter of fact she had not a nerve in her body. She was as hard and supple as a Toledo *blade, with all the brain* she really needed, and an internal

organization practically flawless. With an appearance of the most æsthetic delicacy, she had never had so much as an attack of indigestion, never succumbed to the blues, when that malady was raging, and had no more emotional capacity than an incubator. Oscar Wilde once said of Lady Bridgminster that she would tempt St. Anthony to keep his vows; and true it was that, although only thirty-nine at the time of her husband's death, still reigning as a beauty, and a great lady of whom any husband might be proud, not even an ambitious merchant had sought her hand. But by this time she knew her limitations far better than people fancied, and had neither the hope nor the wish to marry again. But she was a restless dissatisfied creature, bitterly regretting Bridgminster House and Ordham, and always flitting about in search of novelty and distraction. Her son, lying on the sofa in the drawing-room during the warm hours of the afternoon, contrasted her with Margarethe Styr, and pitied her, not the woman whose past was so black that even his imagination dared not lift the curtain.

XXIX

THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS AGAIN

It is possible that Ordham would have delayed paying his respects to his brother from week to week, had not a flattering paragraph in one of the newspapers brought upon him the immediate attentions of his creditors. He ground his teeth, flung their reminders into a drawer of the desk in his bedroom, ordered a telegram sent to Lord Bridgminster and his boxes packed, and started for the north next morning.

Of course he reserved a first-class carriage for the all-day journey. He would have patronized a train de luxe had there been one, or a motor, had the more brilliant extravagance come into being. To spend less to-day that he might have more to-morrow was a principle that only a long period of dire privation could have etched into his creed, and, no doubt, he would have managed to be a luxurious pauper.

During the journey his uneasy apprehensions were varied with remorseful memories of three old servants that had adored and spoilt him since he had come into the world, and to whom he had not given a thought during the past four years. These were the housekeeper, Mrs. Felt, Biscom, the butler, and Cobbs, the coachman. The sure instincts of childhood had driven him to take his little woes, not to his mother's sterile bosom, but to the warm and pillowed surfaces of the personage who had inherited certain of the honours of Ordham, even as Lord Bridgminster had inherited his. Biscom, sovereign of the pantries, had permitted him to make himself ill as often as he desired, and Cobbs had taught him how to ride and had now his

dogs in charge. Then there was Craven, the old gardener — he turned hot and cold at the thought that he had not brought a present to one of them!

Cobbs, in a rusty livery, awaited him at the little moorland station, and Ordham made up in the warmth of his greeting for the lack of a more substantial proof of his affections. There was no footman with the wagonette, and while Hines was attending to his boxes, he asked Cobbs if all the old servants were alive and at the castle. He was not surprised to learn that the immense staff kept during his father's lifetime had been reduced to ten, including those within and without. But at least he should see the older faces, and the prospect cheered him somewhat as he drove through the purple dusk of the moors. For a wave of homesickness had swamped his spirits, then regret, anger, astonishment. For twenty years this beautiful moorland had practically been his, no doubt would come to him in time; but now, now, in the day of his youth, when he most wanted lands and riches and power (it is, until decay sets in, always the immediate time that seems the one desirable period for the great gifts of life), he came as a suppliant to the brother he detested, a man who was even too mean to live as became his position, and who, no doubt, would barely extend to him a welcome. It was a wonder he had sent the wagonette. Ordham had fully expected to go on to the next town and make the rest of the journey in a fly.

Cobbs volunteered the information that the shooting was uncommonly good this year, but Ordham felt no interest in the subject until it occurred to him that if he wished to accomplish the purpose of his journey he must take pains to propitiate Bridgminster in every way. At this detestable thought his haughty crest went up at least two inches. But he had wise moments, as we have seen, and it was seldom he was not capable of cool rational thought. He reflected presently that, after all, he was very young and that it was not only a close relative to whom he had come to ask a good bit of money, but the head of his house, to whom he stood next in succession. Bridgminster should

have been a father to his brood of younger brothers, and it was incredible that he did not accept his obligations. It was time he did, and Ordham felt himself in a temper to bring him to his senses.

But as the carriage approached the high fell upon whose broad table-land the castle stood, he felt more keenly still the freak of fortune which had deprived him of his inheritance. That cold, splendid, formal mass of white and sculptured stone, a palace of the Italian Renaissance rather than an English castle, built by Inigo Jones in 1622–26, and raised above the lofty fell again by a triple terrace, surrounded by Italian gardens, and overlooking thousands of acres of moorland, woods and farms, and a hundred little stone villages, was one of the show places of the north, and it was wasted on a boor whose favourite literature was *The Pink 'Un*, and who would not even permit others to enjoy what he could not appreciate. There had not been a house party at Ordham since his father's death, and, no doubt, the lovely gardens were a wilderness, the superb rooms rat-eaten. To-night there was not a point of light in the vast façade. Ordham lowered his eyelids until they covered the unpleasant glitter of his eyes, and drew his lips against his teeth. Hines, covertly watching him, wondered if he were in pain.

The carriage drove through the unlighted tunnel into the courtyard. The old butler, the gardener, and a footman stood at the foot of the grand staircase, and as Ordham, banishing his gloomy thoughts, descended and shook hands with them, asking intimate personal questions of each, the mask of dignified servitude fell from their faces, and they gazed, smiling and tearful, upon the young man who had lorded it over and bewitched them for twenty years. Ordham almost laughed outright as he realized how they yearned to say, "My lord." He wished to God they could. There was no affected philosophy about Ordham. He longed as ardently to be a peer of the realm as he did for the income of the estates. But after he had convinced them that they had barely left his thoughts during the years of his exile, he added wistfully that he was glad to

see the old place again and wished that death migl have spared his father. Ordham was always adored l servants. With neither familiarity nor condescensio always kind (save to Hines, who sometimes got the bene of his tempers), with a smile of peculiar sweetness and a impenetrable reserve, a careless acceptance of devotio yet with a tacit admission of a minion's claim to ca himself a man, generous, yet never so lavish as to sugge that perhaps his was not the divine right to be waited c hand and foot, — he fulfilled the ideal of the great lord the most exacting class of mortals in the world. An these old men had all the retainer's pride in his uncor monly fine manners, in which there was still nothing ol fashioned, in his aristocratic if not strictly handsome fac in the languid but dignified carriage of his well-knit figur

He followed the footman up the wide marble staircas to his old suite, immense rooms, with lofty frescoed ceiling and still sparsely furnished with the mahogany pieces h had carved when a boy. He felt a thousand years ol and sick at heart. When he saw Felt standing there t greet him, he nearly fell into her great bosom, but co tented himself with taking her hand in both his own an shaking it for a full minute. She told him (tearfully that he had grown and improved, and he bade her invi him for tea in her sitting room on the following da adding bitterly that he should feel at home nowhere else.

"I suppose there is no company in the house?" h asked, with intention.

"Oh, no, sir. His lordship never entertains. Come fou years now we have never had a visitor save her ladyshi and she found it so dull she could never stay long. Th first year there was a hunt breakfast, but it was stiff an sad, Mr. Biscom said, and now the county gentlemen don even call at the castle. It's not like the old days, M John."

"What on earth does he do with himself?" He cou surrender something of his reserve to this old woman wh had given him many a shaking, and he was anxious know more of the brother of whom he had seen so little.

Mrs. Felt shook her head. "He mopes terrible, sir. You wouldn't think it of a man who loves a gun and a horse as he does — but those long evenings all alone! He don't seem one to read — not like you, Mr. John. He's changed a good bit, even since he come — and the last six months or so, before the shooting began — " She paused significantly.

"Does he drink?" No one can be as blunt as a diplomatist.

"There'd be no hiding it from you, sir. You'd see it in a minute for yourself. We've known he was getting more comfort out of drink these two years past, and, as I said, these last few months — well, you can't burn bottles, and his man, for all his solemn pretending that his lordship is perfection, don't take the trouble to bury them, neither. We all have our suspicions that Mr. Flint drinks with his lordship."

"What?"

"No wonder it turns your stomach, sir. It do ours. The Ordhams, begging your pardon, have never been like that. There's been wild ones, and most of them could drink themselves under the table, I've heard from my father and grandfather; but never one that lived familiar with his man and had naught to do with gentlemen. If his mother hadn't been such a young thing when she died, and straight from the schoolroom, we'd have our suspicions."

Ordham laughed shortly. "The King of Bavaria, whose royal blood is a thousand years old, consorts wholly with his lackeys. He has a rotten spot in his brain, and so, no doubt, has my brother. What else can be expected of a recluse that never opens a book? He can't shoot and hunt the year round."

Hines entered and Mrs. Felt departed. When Ordham had finished dressing, half an hour later, the footman knocked, and informing him that all the rooms on this floor, with the exception of his own and his lordship's suites, the dining room, and a small room adjoining, were closed, escorted him down the long familiar corridors to the sanctum of his brother. It was a square room, whose

old frescoes had been whitewashed, and furnished with several leather chairs, a couch, a desk, and a table, the last littered with racing calendars and sporting magazines. It was empty and Ordham sniffed in disgust; it was the sort of room he hated — utterly, baldly, savagely masculine. He had supposed that at least he could console himself in the beautiful rooms devoted to entertaining, and now felt that even the old boudoir of his paternal grandmother, done up in "tapestries" worked with her own hands, and replete with Victorian horrors, would have made him gratefully sentimental. Again his spirits took a downward plunge. He felt nauseated. And through what avenue could he approach the man? He was even more demoralized than he had counted upon.

There was a shuffling step on the hard floor of the passage that led in from the corridor, and Lord Bridgminster entered. He was a big man who, once strong and athletic, was now merely heavy. His face was large and red, his eyes small and dull. He wore a full beard and mustache, which made him look older than he was and hid but little of the scar that disfigured the right side of his face. Nor did it lend him any of the dignity of his younger brother, and he carried his shoulders loosely and moved his hands incessantly. In his youth he had been handsome, with well-cut features and the fresh colouring of his race, but not a vestige of either youth or beauty remained.

"How d'y do?" he said politely enough, extending a limp hand. "I'm a bit off my feed, but you look fit — why shouldn't you? Wish I were twenty-four."

They walked into the dining room together, and Ordham, whose languid eyes missed little, noted a flicker pass between Briscom and Thomas. It said as plainly as speech, "O lud, what a contrast!" Involuntarily he drew himself up, and at the same time resented that any brother of his should be scorned by the very servants as unworthy of the great position to which he had been born. It was almost as if a changeling had been slipped into the family cradle, and yet he knew that there were many like him, for the race is always reverting to its primitive types.

The dinner, served at a small table by an open window, consisted of the heavy joints and vegetables that Ordham detested; but it surprised him that his brother, whom he remembered as a man of mighty appetite, barely picked at it. Nor would he talk. The amenities — as he understood them — over, he responded with but an occasional grunt to the guest's attempts at conversation, and finally the silence became so oppressive that Ordham lost what little appetite the sight and odours of the repast had left him. When the pudding appeared, hopeful of starting a congenial topic, he asked Bridgminster why he did not go up to London and consult a doctor.

"There are doctors in every town in Yorkshire," growled his lordship. "Why should I go to London? Haven't seen it for eighteen years. Should lose my way."

"There are cabs," suggested his brother, delicately. "Or I should be happy to guide you. If you have lost your appetite, there must be something serious the matter."

"Not at all!" Bridgminster raised his voice shrilly. "There's nothing the matter worth mentioning. Can't a man be a bit off his feed without taking a day's journey to pay two guineas to some damned swindler?"

"One can be seriously upset without being threatened with extinction; and when doctors were invented to keep one fit, why be uncomfortable?"

"I thought you wanted a week's shooting. Wasn't that what you said in that letter you honoured me with after you passed those examinations?"

Ordham blushed at this sarcastic reference to the only excuse he had been able to think of when inviting himself to the castle of his fathers. But it must be made to serve. He answered suavely: "One gets so little of that sort of thing on the Continent. Do you go out every day?"

"Certainly. Am I really to have the pleasure of your company on the moors from morning till night?"

"Well — a good part of the day. Remember that I am a bit out of practice, and not as hard as you are."

"I'm no longer hard, but I go out and potter about. It

is a damned sight better than sitting in the house. And I loved it once! God! how I loved it."

Ordham glanced at him with a fleeting pity. The creature was mournfully without resources. No wonder he drank during the long dark winters of the north. This might be the auspicious moment for the opening of his campaign; he asked abruptly: "Why don't you have some of the boys to stop with you if you don't like outsiders—"

"They are outsiders so far as I am concerned. I want no one. That's all I have to say on the subject."

Ordham relapsed into silence. After dinner he smoked on the upper terrace, Lord Bridgminster in his study. They did not meet again even to part for the night.

But they met at breakfast and went together to the covers. It was a long, hot, silent, fatiguing, hideous day. And on the morrow followed its duplicate, and again on the morrow. The bags were small. Bridgminster's hand was unsteady, and Ordham more and more indifferent as to whether he hit a bird or a bush. (The beater kept out of the way.) Each dinner was a repetition of the first, a cold and tasteless luncheon was served on the moor, and he had to appear at the early breakfast. On the third night he went to bed feeling like a weary soldier on the battle-field, a cow-boy, a day labourer. They were the three most detestable days of his life; even that period of apprehension induced by the vagaries of Frau von Wass was as nothing to this unremitting physical discomfort in the society of a boor that never opened his mouth.

On the morning of the fourth day he deliberately remained in bed until noon, sending his brother word that his wrist was lame. The afternoon he idled about the park, almost happy in visiting every nook associated with his boyhood, and lay for an hour on the edge of the pool in the sunken garden surrounded by its silent rigid pointed trees, reflected like the spires of a submerged city. He had made a bare dash through Italy, and determined to visit it during the autumn with Margarethe Styr. Later he descended into the village at the base of the fell and renewed many old friendships, and promised to take a hand at

cricket on the green on the following Saturday. But the cordial welcome he received from these simple folk, who had always regarded themselves as his future tenants, and their ill-concealed dislike of the man who never gave them a nod in passing, revived his despondency and futile annoyance with fate.

He learned upon his return to the castle that his brother had not gone out that day, and when he appeared in the dining room it was apparent that he had been drinking. He made no response to Ordham's greeting and sat through the dinner speechless, his face purple, his breath hot and fevered, barely touching his food. But when the servants had left for the last time, he opened his mouth and spoke:

"Should you be willing to break the entail of this property?"

Ordham, by this time in a state of boiling wrath, disgust, and gloom, which made him wholly reckless, shot a look of contempt at the noble lord at the head of the table and replied curtly, "Of course not."

"Then you are a fool. A new millionnaire would pay a cool half million for it."

"What do you want of more money? You do not spend nine-tenths of what you have."

"The mills are on their last legs. Money is money. What is the use of a silly ark like this? I have done with it in any case. I'm going back to my box in Scotland — lived too long in a house. This Italian thing should be turned into a barrack or a sanatorium. What rot, what insensate pride, to build a palace too big for the biggest family ever born! I believe it is haunted anyhow. I hate it — and my own shootings are better."

"You might lend it to my mother and the boys, with the necessary income to keep it up."

Bridgminster merely laughed at this practical suggestion. His laugh was still well-bred, almost silent, but his loose cheeks shook, his eyes watered. "As if she did not spend enough as it is. I have no desire to die a pauper."

"You seem to forget that you could not. Do you mind telling me who or what you are saving for? You have no

boys to educate, as my father had — unless you contem
plate marrying."

"Marrying!" He hurled out the word with a coarse violence, which, however, failed to disgust his next of kin. "I read somewhere that in America they use Chinamen as house servants. I have a mind to turn out Felt and the rest of them and put in the pig-tails. I'd never see a woman if I could help it." And then he indulged in observations not to be repeated.

"You are fortunate in being able to indulge your antipathies. There is nothing for me but to marry some woman with money, and this I must do in short order whether I like her or not."

"It doesn't matter whether you like her or not; you'd hate her before long." Hopefully: "She might buy this place."

"You forget that I have gone in for diplomacy. I shall be little in England."

"Well, then, help me to dispose of it to this vulgarian for half a million of money."

Ordham made no reply, but helped himself to a glass of chartreuse.

"Why don't you drink port? I didn't know those silly liqueurs were in the house."

"I dislike heavy wines."

"You aren't half an Englishman, anyhow. You haven't eaten a breakfast since you came. Tea and toast — by God! You might be a woman. No wonder you can't shoot. You haven't answered my question."

"I answered it at the beginning of this edifying conversation."

Bridgminster hesitated perceptibly; then, with evident reluctance, but very clearly, he put another question. "Would you help me to break this entail if I gave you five thousand pounds?"

Ordham turned upon him his heavy glittering eyes. "Not for the entire half million."

"You look upon it as your own, I suppose?"

"I have tried to make you understand that I should not

be able to live here; but if I can help it, it shall never go out of the family. Good God! Have you no family pride?"

"Family pride! Who cares for it nowadays? Half the peerage is made up of tradesmen. I want to know that the half million this museum represents is invested in consols."

"I don't fancy that it would all be invested in your name. Did I, as heir presumptive, give my consent— But I shall not give my consent. If you will excuse me, I will go out and smoke. And it is likely that I shall leave in the morning."

"What did you come here for?"

Ordham had risen; looking down into the disagreeable eyes of his brother, he answered deliberately: "To ask you for a thousand pounds. I am in debt for that amount. Also, to ask you to increase my income. I have not one quarter enough to keep me properly."

Bridgminster laughed again, and for fully a minute the two men looked deep into each other's eyes, unaware, perhaps, of all they revealed.

The older brother, his thick upper lip almost flattened in a leer, spoke first: "Do you wish I were dead?"

"How can you say such a thing?"

The formula, with which he so long had been wont lightly to extricate himself from corners, sprang from his lips. He turned on his heel and walked the length of the room. It was a very long room, and when he stood before his brother once more, the flutter in his nerves had subsided. Again the eyes met and held each other, until Ordham said distinctly:

"I do."

He had expected that Bridgminster would laugh again, and it had crossed his mind that if he did the port bottle might fly at his face. But to his astonishment his brother cowered in his chair, his purple face paling, and put out his hands with feebly warding motions.

"Don't say that!" He stammered and his tongue was thick. "I—I fancy I am superstitious. I'm a bit off my

feed — worse than ever to-day. It's this damned haunted barrack. I'll go back to Scotland to-morrow."

Ordham moved a step closer. Transfixing the wretched man with his cold contracted eyes, he made no reply. Bridgminster stirred uncontrollably. "It is a big sum," he muttered.

Still Ordham made no reply, but his eyes were little more than glittering lines. Bridgminster's chest heaved, a flash leaped into his injected eyes.

"I believe you'd kill me if you got a chance — if you thought you wouldn't be found out."

"I would."

"And every damned servant in the castle would swear you free," whimpered his lordship. "Do you think I can't see what silly asses they are about you? They hate me. I haven't a friend in the world but my man, and he could be bought by anybody. You'd be a murderer all the same, though."

"That would not disturb me for a moment."

Bridgminster felt of his flabby muscles. His jaw fell, his eye rolled. "Do you mean to murder me?" he gasped.

Ordham hesitated deliberately, never removing his eyes. "No," he said finally. "It would be a nasty business. But I want that money."

Bridgminster rose heavily. "Come into the office," he said.

Ordham followed the lord of the manor into his shabby sanctuary. The air was stale, the windows unopened. There was a bottle of Scotch whiskey on the table. Bridgminster sat down at the desk, and after some fumbling found his check book and wrote an order for a thousand pounds. The act seemed to restore his equilibrium for the moment. He tore out the check and flung it at his brother, who stood negligently beside the desk, but with nothing of indifference in the eyes into which he seemed to have thrown the whole weight of his brain.

"There!" he shouted. "Take it and be damned. And not another penny as long as I live — as long as I live — Oh! I'm off my feed! I'm off my feed!" He broke down, and flinging his head into his arms, wept aloud.

Ordham, who had had as much as he could endure, left the room and went up to his own. His forehead was damp and cold, he trembled slightly. He doubted if ever again he should be equal to a similar concentration of his faculties, even over a demoralized drunkard; certainly he had no desire to repeat the hideous experience. Better marry and have done with it.

He did not go down to the terrace, but sat at his window until long after midnight. He felt sick and disgusted, little elated at the successful termination of his visit and the prospect of a year or two's peace of mind. A thousand pounds seemed to him a poor compensation for his descent into those foul depths of human nature where the civilized brute slays with his mind even if he withhold his hand. It was his disposition to dwell on the fair and splendid surfaces, harming no man and ignoring the primal passions that crawled over their sands below. Had he, upon his majority, realized the expectations of his careless boyhood, it is doubtful if he ever would have experienced a mean, much less a criminal, impulse, for, although this may be said of many men, Ordham had true refinement of mind and a surpassing indolence. He was a fair sample of all that civilization has yet accomplished for its aristocracies, and had no desire even to be reminded of elemental instincts, much less to be their victim. And the wretched want of money, of a petty thousand pounds, had transformed himself and his brother into two aboriginals. He might in time banish the sensations and impulses he had experienced to-night, but he doubted if he could ever forget the bestial degradation of the head of his house.

And what excuse for such deterioration? His mind flew to Margarethe Styr, who had lifted herself from untold horrors to the very heights of character, intellect, fame. Where had she found that strength? What mysterious arrangement of particles had enabled her to rise from that abyss in which thousands of her sort burned out their brief lives? Was it genius alone? Genius availed little those that began life in the dark back-waters of society unless propelled by force of character, an indomitable will. She

too, in her determined seclusion, lived a selfish life of a sort, but at least she gave delight to thousands, she spent freely on promising young singers, and she was an example for all women, dreaming ambitiously, to follow. More, she was an inspiration. And she had come out of what? The picture was not to be invoked, but the bare fact made the man downstairs, who had been born one of the inheritors of the earth, the more unfit to live.

He realized suddenly that he felt closer to Styr than he had ever felt before. And she was the one person on earth to whom he could confess the horrid experience of this night. He made up his mind to return to her at once, no matter where she was. They could meet in the various cities where she sang, as freely as in her home, although not, of course, as delightfully.

Then his mind swung to the future, the future he must face upon his second return from Munich. He should never willingly exchange a syllable with his brother again. There was not the faintest hope that Bridgminster would increase his income. Nor was the man's health, as far as he could judge, seriously impaired. He might go mad and be chucked into an asylum, but lunatics lived forever. True, he might fall on his gun, or break his neck on the hunting field, but these were mere contingencies. Meanwhile, save for this passing relief, his own problem was as serious as ever. He should spend five times his present income in any capital to which he was accredited, and he could think of nothing he would not rather do than force his mother into heavy sacrifices. Turn over the detestable question as often as he might, he could find but one solution. He had disliked the prospect of matrimony before he knew Margarethe Styr, and it was doubly hateful now. He did not want to marry her, nor could he spend his life dawdling at her skirts; but — well — once more he was forced to admit that he could not have everything in life he wanted at once. There should be that last long visit to Munich, however, and then he would return and swallow his medicine.

XXX

LADY BRIDGMINSTER, POTTER

But he was not to return to Munich and Margarethe Styr at present. That excellent friend of his, Princess Nachmeister, having ascertained throughout the summer that, although indefatigable in his attendance upon the prima donna, he wore neither the hopeless mien of rejected love nor that of sublime content, had kept her lance in rest. Moreover, she well knew that the vestal Lutz would never have lent her countenance to a liaison, neither could it have escaped eyes sharp with an old maid's resentful curiosity. Therefore, although uneasy, Excellenz had not thought it worth while to interfere with his studies; but upon the day she learned of his departure for London she wrote to Lady Bridgminster, with whom she had some time since fallen into correspondence, advising her to prevent her son's return to Munich. Only he could have resisted Styr during long months of intimacy, and then only because she had chosen that he should. But he was growing older every hour, there was no telling in what moment he might awake and call himself an ass, nor, in faith, when Styr would recover from her long attack of virtue. Sudden interruptions in deep but continent intimacies had proved fatal before. They would not be the first to discover that they could not exist apart. Better divert his mind at once.

Therefore, when Ordham drove up to his mother's house on his return from the north, he was surprised to find the curtains up, the door opened by a footman instead of the caretaker that had attended to his wants during his previous visit. He wished that he had driven from Padding-

ton to Victoria, for he was in no humour to meet any other member of his family at present; but when the footman informed him that her ladyship would expect him for tea in the drawing-room in half an hour he summoned what grace was in him, and sent her word that he would join her as soon as he had rid himself of soot and dust.

His bath braced him somewhat, and he went downstairs resignedly to answer his mother's questions. He hated questions, and she could ask more than any one he knew. Lady Bridgminster was seated at the tea-table, and knowing better than to wait for him, had just finished her first cup. She rose and met him halfway, for it was several years since she had treated him negligently, and even her kiss, if not too maternal, was something more than a peck. He told her that she was looking very handsome, and in that rosy light she seemed little older than her portrait. She wore clinging trailing garments of smoke-colored chiffon embroidered with peacocks' feathers, and long strands of dull green and blue beads covered her flat chest and were wound through the mazes of her beautiful silvery blonde hair. She looked as æsthetic as Wilde himself, and, indeed, he designed more than one of her gowns.

"Glad to see you so fit, Johnny dear," she said in a very light musical voice. "It is too delightful that you have passed those tiresome examinations. How is Bridg?"

"Beastly drunk, probably."

Lady Bridgminster, who had floated back to her chair, opened her eyes very wide. She rarely altered her expression, as it was then the belief that immobility made for perpetual youth, but she allowed her well-trained orbs to shed forth her astonishment.

"What? Does Bridg drink?"

"Rather." Ordham had selected the most comfortable chair in the room and pushed it to the table. He received his cup of tea and disposed himself in the depths.

"Don't be tiresome. Has he taken to drink as a habit?"

"He can barely handle a gun, eats next to nothing, and is now quite, instead of half, a boor. His face is twice its

former size. There is no doubt that he is going the pace in his own quiet way."

"And his health?"

"Good enough."

"That accounts for several things I noticed when I was there last, but never thought of attributing to drink. Of course you did not get the money?"

"I got it."

Lady Bridgminster drew a deep sigh of relief. "Then those wretched creditors of yours can be disposed of. The interviews I have had with them! What is the world coming to? My own are not more vulgar and impertinent. But this is only a respite, Johnny. Two years hence you will be in the same predicament; worse, no doubt. Bridg is good for twenty years yet. Did you persuade him to increase your income?"

"No, and he never will."

"Then you must marry at once. Let us not beat about the bush."

"I am not ready to marry. Please remember that I am barely twenty-four."

"Fiddlesticks! You are forty. You are the sort in whom years count for next to nothing. Besides, your father was married at twenty-two, my father when he was six months younger. But that has little to do with it. There are certain times in life when opportunities seem fairly to fly at one. Ignore these caprices of Fortune, and you may spend the rest of your life chasing her. One of the greatest heiresses in England is dying to marry you. Not only have I carefully prepared her mind, but she has always been more or less in love with you, although she has not seen you now for five years."

"Who can she be?"

"Manlike! Probably you will not even recall her when I tell you her name, for when she used to come to Ordham with her mother you were following the yellow curls of Jessie Middleton about her father's park and never looked at poor Rosamond."

A dark flush rose to Ordham's very hair and he drew

his brows together. "You surely do not mean Rosamond Hayle?"

"Ah! You do remember her?"

"Her front teeth stuck out. Her hair was like tow. Her pasty skin was covered with green freckles—"

"Oh, that was years ago. She has vastly improved."

"Time cannot have altered the formation of her upper jaw. I doubt if it could put colour into her hair. You know quite well that I shall never marry an ugly woman. I even hate ugly men and children. I don't set up to be an æsthetic ass, but beauty I will have if I can command it, and at least I need not fasten myself for life to a woman whose ugliness is not even distinguished. As I recall Rosamond Hayle she was the apotheosis of the commonplace—and that was only five years ago."

"My son, remember that she has forty thousand a year in her own right. They discovered coal mines on unentailed lands in Nottinghamshire and she was the only child."

"I hope she may enjoy it. What of the American beauty and heiress you were so keen about?"

"Do you mean Mabel Cutting?" Lady Bridgminster dipped her tones in ice.

"Of course. Are there so many?"

"I thought favourably of her at first; but really, Mrs. Cutting was too keen. It was indecent. If we must put ourselves up for sale, let us not admit the fact to these outsiders. Her silly pedantic little daughter may have more money than Rosamond, but she is not our sort."

"Pedantic?" Ordham had lost the rest of his mother's observations. A vision of the deliciously pretty empty-headed little chatterbox had risen before him, alluring indeed after the frightful menace of Lady Rosamond Hayle. "Are we talking of the same person?"

"Rather. When the child first came over I liked her. She was a sweet, innocent, well-bred little thing, who knew no more than a young girl should. But the change soon began. Nearly every marriageable man in London ran *after her,* which was natural enough. I will do several

the justice to believe that they were really in love with her, irrespective of the millions. Youth and beauty and sweet manners go far, and I suppose there is romance left even in London. I did not mind her head being turned. That also was natural, with artists painting her for the Academy and all the rest of it — although it was too silly of her to insist upon having that ridiculous LaLa in every picture. Well — when after a mere three months of such a success as few girls enjoy, she suddenly announced herself bored with society, declared that she did not yet know enough to waste so much time, that men talked only nonsense to her, and therefore taught her nothing, she forced her unfortunate mother, who loves society more than any woman I ever met, to retire to the country with a staff of tutors — oh, I have no patience with such nonsense. When girls have youth and beauty, the less brains they have the more attractive they are."

"Oh?" Ordham had risen to his feet, his eyes very bright.

"Is not that too brief period for enjoyment pure and simple? Intellect does well enough when everything else has deserted a woman. What a waste of time and energy before! It has made this little American insufferable. When I heard yesterday they were in town I went out of common civility — as well as curiosity — to call. The girl looks moonstruck. She had not a word to say. No doubt her brains are addled."

"Then they are in town? I must call to-morrow."

Lady Bridgminster rose, and, sweeping over to her son's side (she never merely walked), laid her hand on his shoulder. Her face was flushed and there were tears in her voice.

"My son," she said solemnly, "let these people alone. Their ways are not our ways. They never make themselves really like us. It was only my desire to see you care-free in your youth that made me consider Mabel Cutting for a time. I have always disapproved of these international marriages. Americans are a thin, passionless, *hybrid race, and, I am* sure, vulgar at the core, no matter

how deep the veneer. How could it be otherwise? Marry a woman of your own class and race—"

"Not Rosamond Hayle."

"Don't be tiresome." She almost shook him. "No man knows how his wife looks six months after he has married her."

"Think of those six months."

"And a plain wife is so safe. In a diplomatic career, of all things, you want no scandals. How should you like being married to a professional beauty?"

"I should not mind a bit. I should find it insufferable to be the husband of a wife that every other man rejoiced was not his."

"No man ever rejoiced that a woman with forty thousand pounds a year was not his wife."

"I should if she were ugly."

"Are you going to Grosvenor Square?"

"Of course. They showed me great politeness in Munich. It is a matter of common decency."

"I believe they came up on purpose." Lady Bridgminster's well-composed features were in disarray. "What else would bring them up at this season? Their excuse, that Mabel wished to attend a series of concerts, was too silly. I might have suspected at once. You will not be such a silly little fly as to rush into their parlour?"

"There is no moat and drawbridge about the house in Grosvenor Square, I suppose? Don't be foolish, Lady Pat." (Everlastings rarely train their children to address them as "mother.") "I must call on Mrs. Cutting. It commits me to nothing. If you can find me a beautiful and not too-English English girl, I will marry her, but not Rosamond Hayle."

"I don't know of another English girl of her class with such a fortune. I know these upstarts will get you!"

"Well, I shall not propose to-morrow," he said lightly. And then he changed the conversation so deliberately that his mother sighed and rested on her arms for the present.

XXXI

ORDHAM ESCAPES A HANSOM IN PICCADILLY

On the following morning he rose at the comparatively early hour of ten, and, repairing to Piccadilly, bought presents for the servants at Ordham and even sent them off himself. He had intended to omit this exertion in favour of Hines, but the morning was so fresh, and he felt so young and buoyant, particularly after having turned his check into the bank, and the prospect of meeting the beautiful Mabel once more was so unexpectedly enlivening, that he was equal to almost any form of energy.

He even sauntered into the Green Park, and there he met Mrs. Cutting, taking the famous pug for an airing. She dropped the leash when she saw Ordham, and although there was no warmth in her cold pure eyes, her smile was dazzling.

"Dear Mr. Ordham! What a pleasure! Lady Bridgminster told me that you were in England, but I gathered that you intended to remain in the north and shoot for weeks to come."

"I do not care for shooting and had rather intended to go back to the Continent for a time — to perfect myself in languages. It may, however, be merely an excuse to put off those six months in the F. O. as long as possible."

"But you have passed your examinations!"

"Heaven only knows how. But my French and German are really very bad. I need the theatres more than anything else."

"I won't attempt to conceal my disappointment. To be *sure, I was resigned* not to see you for a few weeks — but

now that I have seen you — well, if it must be, at least you will come to us before you leave? I must show you what I have made of my little girl. She had an enormous success in society. Just now she thinks she wants to be intellectual, artistic, musical, although she played far better than most girls already. It is rather a bore for me, but I am hoping it will pass. I tell her it is a pity she did not have the seizure while at school. But I fancy it is merely the reaction from the rush of the season, and a little too much frivolity, perhaps too many suitors. But I should not say that!"

"Oh, my mother has told me. I hear she uses her scalps as cotillon favours!"

"How like you! But I wish she had fewer." Mrs. Cutting wrinkled her brows delicately. "She was so sweetly simple and natural before — do you remember what a chatterbox she was? And all this adulation has made her bored, indifferent. I don't think she is conceited, but I am afraid she has permitted the idea to take lodgment in that clever little head of hers that all men are far too easy game, and therefore to be despised. I have hinted gently that without the bait of her fortune even her beauty and cleverness might not have made her the belle of a London season, but you cannot convince eighteen that men are mercenary, and no doubt some of the poor fellows were sincere enough."

"Unfortunately, most men cannot afford to be too sincere." Ordham smiled grimly. "For instance, I could not dream of marrying a poor girl. And it must be far easier even to love a pretty rich girl than a pretty poor one. We have not been brought up on the love-in-a-cottage ideal, and when we try it generally come a cropper."

She remembered that he had taken her breath away with his audacious candour more than once during the fortnight of their previous acquaintance, and smiled gayly.

"But a rich girl *can* be loved. That is the point to bear in mind. It is Mabel's argument, by the way, and even I *believe* that a really lovely woman need not be eclipsed by *her money*. Of course I am quite aware of your point of

view. But all the same I believe you to be capable of what the world calls folly."

"You mean that I would marry a poor girl?"

"You are capable of it."

"Possibly. But I know of no folly that I have less intention of committing."

"Oh, I don't say that you will. It is merely your capacity for the sudden and romantic wrecking of your life that makes you so interesting." She stooped and recovered the leash. Her face, when she stood upright once more, was flushed, but she looked him straight in the eyes. "I have always hoped that you would marry Mabel," she said, and her courage touched his chivalric nerve while it flushed his face. "I shall be perfectly frank. I wished it from the moment we met. She was too young to think of such a thing, and you were obliged to remain in Germany. But now — she has developed quite wonderfully, and you are quite free. I shall continue to be frank. When I brought Mabel over Lady Bridgminster took a great fancy to her, and I feel sure that she had some such idea herself, although naturally we could not speak of it; but latterly she seems to have taken a dislike to the poor child, and to have set her heart upon a frightfully plain English heiress —"

"She heard my opinion on that subject last night. I fancy she will not broach it again." Ordham spoke ironically, but his blush had deepened and he moved about nervously.

Mrs. Cutting shook her head with a little absent gesture of despair. "Your mother is not the woman to relinquish lightly any cherished plan, and this Lady Rosamond Hayle seems to be a particular friend of hers. You could never be married against your will — at least I think you could not. But you will see Lady Rosamond quite intimately, you will become fascinated with her virtues, which no one can dispute, and forget her plainness."

"I have no intention of entering the possibly dangerous zone of her virtues. But you are very kind. Why on earth have you selected me? There are bigger fish in this *great pond.*"

"That is as it may be. But I am very exacting. I want far more than a title — which, no doubt, you will inherit in due course. You see I am really frank! I got to know you very well in Munich, remember, and of all the young men I have ever met you are the only one to whom I care to intrust my daughter. That is, if you really could love her."

"Oh! Love!" Ordham's eyes stared far beyond his companion in a manner not at all to her taste. She resumed sadly:

"Of course she might not be able to interest you after your experience of so many complicated European women. And she — well, Mabel is a mystery even to me — what girl is not a mystery? When we left Munich I fancied that you had made an indelible impression upon her cloistered little heart. But now — as I told you — she affects to despise all men; and so much has happened since then. A girl is no sooner launched in the world than she grows a year every day. And I did not feel that I should be justified in keeping your memory green in her mind, for how could I know that you would not have loved and married before we met again? But I wish! I wish! If she does not marry you, I hope it will be many years before she marries at all. Of course there are many fine men in the world, and she can afford to wait. A fortune hunter shall never have her. Of that I am determined."

"There are thousands of fine fellows in the world," said Ordham, generously, increasingly desirous of meeting the enigmatic and difficult Mabel. "When may I call? I should not think of leaving London without renewing that delightful acquaintance. I had intended to try my luck this afternoon."

"Come at five. And perhaps you will dine with us before you go? You cannot be rushed with engagements at this season, and it will be pleasant to see a bit of you, even if —"

Ordham laughed and shook hands with the handsome charming woman, who looked so unconventionally eager

in spite of her cool eyes. "I have never been so flattered in my life, and it is wonderful of you to be so enchantingly frank. Men must get so sick of transparent angling — I wonder that anything induces the big fish to bite. Please don't let Miss Cutting know that you like me, or she will be sure to hate me. Of course I shall call at five to-day. And dine with you to-morrow? May I?"

He walked to his club in a very thoughtful mood. Here, no doubt, was the natural solution of his difficulties. But with the prospect of that easy escape came a passionate wave of protest, the protest of masculine youth at paying the price. He had not the faintest idea that he could fall in love with Mabel Cutting; and were her millions an adequate compensation for the loss of his precious liberty? He felt that a man's youth should last until thirty. Time enough then for shackles: wife — and children! He blushed angrily at the thought. This cursed question of money! If his brother would settle two thousand a year on him, he would not consider matrimony with the most beautiful girl that walked.

And deep down in his heart he heard a murmured demand for the woman by the Isar. Was this woman, perchance, his mate? He stopped, appalled at the thought, in the middle of Piccadilly, and was nearly run over by a hansom cab. To what end? The difference in their ages meant nothing to him, but he could not ask the various diplomatic circles of the world to accept Margarethe Styr. Nor was there the least probability that she would renounce her career to keep house for him and devote her talents to the advancement of his own. Even if she loved him — and did she? — how could he demand such a sacrifice? Society would be a poor substitute for art, for the adulation of the multitude. Moreover, there was the question of money again. She might possess a small fortune, but it would not go far in his world. To permit her to remain on the stage he would not consider for a moment. He would neither abandon his career nor would he live on a woman's earnings. To marry a girl with a large inheritance was one thing, but to loaf about while

his famous wife sang to a public ignorant of his very name, that neither might want for the luxuries to which they were accustomed — good God!

He wondered, as he turned abruptly from the door of his club and strolled down into St. James's Park, that the idea of marrying Margarethe Styr had postulated itself. It had not even occurred to him before. He had looked forward to seeing her as often as he could manage, to keeping her in his life, but not even to being her lover. Did he love her? Had he loved her during those enchanting months, and been too contented, too occupied, to understand? Had she purposely refrained from exercising those seductions of which she must be passed mistress, because she knew that love would devastate the lives of both? For a moment he seemed to be peering over the edge of a round wall into the great wells of human nature. He had a passing impression that Margarethe Styr was Nature herself, that in her bosom were all the mysteries, the secrets, the treasures of life, and that they were his, whether he could ever take them or not.

Did he love her? He drew his brows together in the deepest perplexity he had ever experienced. There was no turbulence of emotion in him, no madness of passion, no desire. It was a mental longing — that and something deeper, which he did not pretend to define, but which, so far at least, did not affect his senses. Were they on fire, with the instinct of man for his mate, he knew that he should take the next train for the Continent. But they were not, and the idea suddenly entered his cool wise young brain that he had better stay away from the Continent altogether. It was quite possible that a multiplicity of causes, her own subtle manipulation among them, had delayed his loving this most complete of all women, and it was on the cards that they both would lose their heads the moment they met again. Well! They had got through a dangerous summer safely, and its memory was wholly delightful. He, at least, would not defy the gods, but steer clear of the siren's rock. Aside from motives of prudence, he was by no means sure that he wanted to

experience a tremendous passion; the indolence, the super-civilization in him shrank from elemental tumults. He had locked up the memory of the scene with his brother, but he heard the key rattle for a moment, and his distaste for the primitive increased.

He jerked up the thought of his career and forced his mind to dwell upon it, succeeding so thoroughly that he felt ambition incarnate as he headed for home. He would begin his duties in the Foreign Office on the morrow instead of demanding a leave of absence; that would keep him in England for six months to come. Then he would manage to be sent to St. Petersburg or Madrid, instead of to Berlin, as he had contemplated.

At luncheon he was forced to listen to eulogies of a woman he would not have married had she presented him with a million in the funds, and revenged himself by talking about Mabel Cutting. But deep down in his being went on that same mysterious protest, mutter, demand for the supreme rights of mortal on this imperfect plane called life.

XXXII

EVERY MAN HIS OWN PILOT

MRS. CUTTING had bought, several years since, the lease of one of the great houses in Grosvenor Square from a bachelor who, late in life, had inherited it among other properties, and had lived comfortably at his club too long to move or to think favorably of matrimony. At his tenant's tactful suggestion he reserved the ancestral furniture and pictures, sending them to one of his country houses, and Mrs. Cutting, in refurnishing, had wisely gone to Paris. Knowing the importance of the least of individualizations in a city which resents the unorthodox and is correspondingly fascinated by it, she had, instead of making her mansion the replica of a thousand other fine houses or even of permitting herself to be seduced by æstheticism, that bastard of the Brotherhood, re-created the big heavy rooms into a setting appropriate for a marquise of the eighteenth century. But too wise, or too indifferent, to become the slave of any period, her house was merely light, gay, brilliant, not too full of exquisite furniture gilded and brocaded; there were pastels in very old frames, costly trifles, the whole effect infinitely *French*. Everybody pronounced the word vaguely upon entering the series of reception rooms, drawing-rooms, and boudoirs, barely noting if the effect were produced by the pale brocades set in the white and gold of the panelled walls, the polished floors, the old but beautiful rugs, or by the numberless details, such as the bluish grey inner blinds, drawn up on either side and in the middle, that one sees in any modern French house. But the effect was there, that bright delicate luxurious setting for two beautiful women as dainty and

splendid as ever the aristocracy of France achieved before her people found themselves; and all London approved and went there to be refreshed. Although it was now quite three years since the house had been remodelled and thrown open, the illness and death of her husband, followed by litigation, had called Mrs. Cutting so often from the city of her heart that the season just past was the first she had spent uninterruptedly in London since she had been able to equip herself for conquest. An outsider, lacking the halo of fame, no matter how wealthy, cannot impress herself deeply upon a vast and busy society with no more obvious setting than a house hired from some economical noble. But this past season was a very pleasant memory to Mrs. Cutting, not only on account of her daughter's unqualified success, but because no American in London could dispute the fact that her house had been the scene of the most superb and perfectly appointed entertainments with which dollars had ever defied sovereigns.

Lady Bridgminster, at once the most exclusive and the most independent of women (her Bohemian protégés belonged to the aristocracies of the art world), had been her sponsor, and she had met at once many great people, ordinarily indifferent to or disapproving of rich Americans, whom she might not have met for years, if ever. She was booked for certain country houses in the autumn and early winter which she had long felt she owed it to her American pride to visit, but, even with her already select acquaintance and social tact, hitherto inaccessible. In consequence, never had two women been such devoted friends from the middle of April until the middle of July as "Lady Pat" and Mrs. Cutting, and society had been considerably amused.

As Ordham was escorted through the immense entrance hall and up to the reception room at the head of the grand staircase, then left where he could command a long vista, he felt as if he had entered an enchanted palace. He had been in many palaces, many fine mansions, but never before where the wise gift of selection had eliminated the haphazard accumulations of the centuries, and appropriated

all that was beautiful and artistic in historic houses whose owners could no longer pay their monthly bills. He knew what this wondrous interior meant to countless impoverished families whose ancestors had dazzled France. It was the most complete demonstration of the power of practically unlimited wealth that he had ever witnessed, and he wondered if rich Americans really appreciated their good fortune, or if they took it as a matter of course from the moment they were laid in their golden cradles; he was sure that American royalties, unlike European, would never condescend to use merely gilded cradles.

Down at one end of the long vista he saw Mabel Cutting approaching. He rose, but stood still for a moment, hoping that she had not yet seen him, and curious to discover what his first impression of her would be after these eventful months of separation. Moreover, he felt suddenly nervous.

His only impression at the moment was that the figure moving toward him down the bright formal French rooms, was the most graceful he had ever seen. Styr walked like a goddess. Mabel Cutting had the exquisite unconscious grace of a highly bred young girl, a grace that suggests a complete independence of the gravity of the earth. She walked as lightly as if she had never thought about walking at all; her slender figure had none of the conscious upstanding dignity of maturity; it was almost somnambulistic, an effect in harmony with her dreamy large eyes. She wore a gown and hat of various shades of green, and looked like spring reappearing for a moment to reproach the excesses of summer. And she was far more beautiful than when he had seen her last. Oh, no doubt of that. Beside her trotted LaLa, looking like a gnome.

Ordham stood spellbound before this vision for a moment; then advanced with even more dignity than usual, that she might not detect his tremors. Miss Cutting smiled pleasantly and offered her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Ordham?" Her voice was light, sweet, cold, undeveloped. "Mother will be down presently and give you a cup of tea. Shall we sit in here? It is not so formal."

She preceded him into a large room, which assuredly, thought he, must have been lifted bodily from some unfortunate royal chateau; but he was far more interested in the graceful figure before him, in her cool ease of manner. Where was the chatterbox of six months since? As they seated themselves beside the tea-table she politely but a little absently asked him if he was glad to be in England again after so long a sojourn abroad; then, her curiosity apparently satisfied, left the conversation in his keeping. He was searching his mind for a new subject to avert an awkward pause, wondering if the great absent eyes fixed upon him gave heed to his unprecedented exertions, and growing vaguely angry, when Mrs. Cutting came brightly in. She shook him warmly by the hand, and prepared to pour out tea with a smiling alertness that made her daughter appear the more indifferent by contrast. As Mrs. Cutting ran on, indeed, Mabel seemed to withdraw more and more into herself, and even while drinking her tea gave the impression of performing a polite act in which she took no interest. At all events she made no attempt to enter the conversation, which, for a time, was all of Ordham's examinations and future. Once or twice he sought her eyes in the suddenly remembered fashion of that fortnight in Munich when they flirted behind "Momma's" back; but in vain. Mrs. Cutting was no longer Momma and Mabel was no longer Mabel. What was she? Being a mere man, it was incomprehensible to him that even a London season and many admirers, to say nothing of tutors and books, could transform a beautiful but decidedly commonplace child into a wondrous creature with the poise of her mother, the mystery of those maidens the poets invoke from cloudland, and the intellectual abstraction of a budding genius. She was so perfectfully beautiful, so provocative in her abstraction, that he was at first merely interested. But at the end of half an hour, when she had not addressed a remark to him, but had sat as if she were in front of a camera, he began to grow really angry. He was not accustomed to disdain. He was quite aware that if not yet the head of his family, he was more than a match for any American

girl, and had received something more than encouragement from the young lady's mamma. Moreover, and here he sat up suddenly and began talking with animation to Mrs. Cutting, was he not the intimate friend of one of the greatest women in the world? For the first time he felt the flattery of the haughty Styr's selection, and in the present engagement it gave him a distinct moral advantage that almost visibly uplifted his chest. He had permitted Mrs. Cutting to sustain the conversation before; he now turned to her wholly, and, the talk having drifted to Munich, gave her a brilliant description of Styr's Isolde, which should at least display to this absurd young person his knowledge of the art which had lured her to London in the heats of August.

"It is the disappointment of my life that I have not seen Styr," said Mrs. Cutting. "She did not sing while I was in Munich, and I have never been to Bayreuth. To be frank, I care little for Wagner. When one has been brought up on Patti and Nilsson, so to speak, —"

"Mother!"

Ordham turned with a start. Miss Cutting was regarding her mother with eyes sparkling disapproval. She moved them to Ordham, and the access of interest in those profound orbs was unmistakable. "Thank heaven I am not old-fashioned!" Her voice was so sweet, almost plaintive, that even an American mother could not feel snubbed. "What little I have heard of Wagner — almost wholly at orchestral concerts here — makes me long to hear more — all. Perhaps my English teacher infected me with his own enthusiasm. And he, too, has heard the great Styr. Is it true, Mr. Ordham, that you have heard her in all her rôles?"

"Oh, many times."

"And is she really so great?"

"She is quite the greatest singer and actress in the world."

"Ah!" Miss Cutting looked him full in the eyes. Her own seemed to say: "How wonderful you are to love and understand such great things, when most men at your age

prefer the Halls!" Mrs. Cutting interposed in her cool, smooth, almost aggressively cultivated voice:

"But she, too, has limitations. She could not sing any of the old rôles. I may be old-fashioned, darling, but I assuredly do prefer Lucia, Leonora, Violetta, with their marvellous vocalization, to those declaiming and unmelodious rôles. I sat through *Die Walküre* once, and it seemed to me that they merely talked interminably in the singing register. It was quite a week before I felt rested."

"But *Die Walküre* is full of drama!" Miss Cutting looked at her parent with a soft steadiness of reproach. Ordham had never seen eyes that revealed and concealed so much. Her small curved mouth, pink and half parted over the little white teeth, was as innocent as a baby's, yet withal had a delightfully sarcastic uplift at the corners. "Dear mother! There is not a moment when one must not be thrilled by the happenings of very strange things indeed, and it was Wagner's object to ennoble speech; he thought the old trills and roulades—and all—debased it."

"Yes, darling, but the speeches need not be so long. Think of Fricka scolding Wotan throughout half of an interminable act; and as for that duologue in the last act between Wotan and Brünhilde—well, its mere memory threatens to deprive me of all the patience I possess. But I foresee my fate. I shall have to take you to Munich next winter."

"A month at least. I must have that before we go to the Riviera. Oh, there is so much in the world to see, to learn! I wish I were thirty, so that I could feel that I had accomplished a little."

"You have begun," said Ordham, smiling. His anger and pique had vanished. "But I hope you like England."

"It is my second home, of course. Mother has brought me here during most of my vacations." But there was no enthusiasm in her tones, and she added: "I don't fancy I shall care deeply for any one place until I have seen a great deal of life. My head feels like an empty house full of tiny rooms, all vacant behind staring windows. Well, one grows older every day."

Ordham looked at that lovely head, with its mass of shining yellow hair, the full luminous brow, the deep dark eyes, the pure polished whiteness of the skin. He could imagine no more delightful task than furnishing those clean empty little rooms. He suddenly felt that he had accumulated a vast amount in his twenty-four years, and that perhaps it was his duty to decorate the interior of that shapely skull. But her eyes wandered from him again as Mrs. Cutting asked him abruptly what he knew of Styr.

"One hears more and more of her every day, over here," she added. "So many English people have become convinced that it is their duty to admire Wagner, and are making conscientious efforts. They not only go to Bayreuth, but these last two or three years they have taken in Munich on their way to the Riviera or Italy. Some of the artists, too, come back raving over her. No doubt they really understand Wagner. Do you meet her off the stage?"

"Rarely."

"Is she supposed to be educated?"

"Educated? She is a highly accomplished woman — has furnished all her little rooms, I should think." He smiled and turned to Mabel, who was feeding the pug.

"Ah! you know her?" Mrs. Cutting's voice was very smooth. "She is not received?"

"Rather!"

"How interesting! And how odd — that she should be — well, like that — and received. There are stories." She glanced significantly at the averted head of her young daughter. It was patent that Mabel was not to be permitted to furnish any of her vacant cells in the primal colours.

Ordham lifted his shoulders. "She is a great artist. In Munich that suffices. And now, at least, I fancy that little but her art interests her. Her life is one long act of devotion and sacrifice."

"Nevertheless," said Mrs. Cutting, as Mabel, having boxed the ears of LaLa for spilling his cream, was escorting him to the door, "she had better not return to New *York.*"

Ordham's eyes, suddenly large and cold, interrogated
er.

"It seems that one of the old gossips of the Union Club
ent a few days not long since in Munich and recognized
yr as a woman — well, whom every New York man once
iew by sight, at least. He always spends the season in
ondon, and now that Styr is becoming famous, it gives
n great satisfaction to add his little quota of scandal."

"It is quite possible that he mistook her for some one
e. She looks like one woman off the stage, and an-
ier on." Ordham felt an uncontrollable nervousness in
knees and moved about the room, staring at the soft
stels.

"He saw her both on and off. There is no doubt, I
icy. She was supposed to be dead, lost with a cheap
mpany of players on the Pacific Coast. But he says that
one that had ever seen her could possibly mistake her
any one else, greatly as she has gone off — he says
it she was a beautiful tigress when she squandered for-
ies in New York. But, as you say, it does not matter
Munich, where, dear souls, they would worship the
vil himself if he could sing. And, of course, she medi-
es no social conquest of London or New York. Lever-
g says that she is very clever!"

"She is quite above thinking of such things." Then, not
shing to hurt this charming woman's feelings, he added
stily: "Art is a very exalting as well as exacting mis-
ss. Nothing else seems worth while to so ardent a
tary as Frau von Tann. If ever she comes here to sing,
ancy she will be the one to raise the social defences.
ou know that we too can be indifferent to pasts when
ey are walled off by fame. If Countess Tann created
furore at Covent Garden, she would be run after by
ery lion hunter in London. Remember Bernhardt."

The colour left Mrs. Cutting's cheek, and an angry light
rang to her eyes. But if prompted to deliver her mind
its disgust for the complaisance of a society in which
e found no other fault, she thought better of it and re-
ed calmly:

"Well — Bernhardt is French. One never expects much of people that have not had the advantages of the strict tenets of the Anglo-Saxon race; and when a transgressor is the most famous actress in the world, and has lived her life in Paris, the most feverish of all lives in the most feverish of all cities — well, of course, one not only makes allowances, but looks upon her as such a sheer outsider that one feels justified in paying tribute to her genius — or further satisfying one's curiosity, whichever it may be. But this Styr — ah! here is the carriage. You will drive with us for an hour in the Park? Of course there will be nobody to look at, but the air will be delightful."

He sat opposite the graceful voluble mother and the silent beautiful daughter with her eyes full of dreams and the hideous pug on her lap; and not only in the park, but during the drive down to Richmond, where he persuaded them to go for dinner. Once only, as they drove home through the twilight, he held Mabel's eyes for a full minute. There was none of the old innocent coquetry in them, but they looked as if they were taking his measure and pronouncing him worth while if not heroic.

Styr's name was not mentioned again, nor for many a day after.

XXXIII

SLOW MAGIC

LADY BRIDGMINSTER paid her son a visit next morning while he was still in bed and drinking his tea. He was but half awake and pretended to no enthusiasm. But his mother pushed a chair to the bedside and tapped the coverlet with her long fingers. It was patent that for once in her life she was nervous.

"I must speak, Johnny," she exclaimed. "And as I have several engagements to-day, this is my only opportunity."

"Where can you have engagements in London at this time of year?"

"I am lunching with Rosamond, and then we visit a flower show, and afterwards attend a committee meeting — one of her charities —"

"So she is in town?"

"It is no more remarkable that she should come to town in this stifling weather for the sake of doing good than that little American should suddenly discover that she must come up for second-rate concerts. It does not strike you as odd, I suppose?"

"If I for a moment believed that Miss Cutting came up to London in August on my account, I should be flattered to death; but as a matter of fact, she quite snubbed me."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"But she did. I can assure you I have felt a walking tragedy ever since."

"She was probably in a bad temper about something."

"She looked precisely like an angel."

"Well, no doubt angels have their moods, and she is a

spoilt child of fortune. Two millions sterling, and I cannot pay my dressmaker!"

"You wrote me once that an American daughter-in-law would be sure to pay your bills."

"So would Rosamond. I do not want American dollars."

"Am I to understand that Rosamond Hayle has also come up to London in August —"

"She does not know that you are back from the north, poor dear. I lured her up, pretending interest in her charity." She leaned forward and took her son's hands in the close grasp of her own. "Johnny," she said intensely, "promise me that you will not marry this Cutting girl — at least that you will not propose to her until you have tried to like Rosamond. That dear English girl has vastly improved. And perhaps I have done wrong to hurry you. There are other girls growing up that will have a good bit of their own. I can think of three. If you will not consider poor Rosamond, at least promise me that you will not fall headlong into the net of these Americans."

"Of course."

"Do you forget that I brought you up?" His mother's voice rose with her indignation. "At least pay me the compliment of frankness. And you will say 'Of course' at the altar instead of 'I will,' if you are not on your guard."

"Well, then, I won't. Eliminate Rosamond Hayle at once and forever. I am not at all sure that I wish to marry Miss Cutting. Before I met her again yesterday I knew that I should be hard driven indeed to make up my mind to marry a chatterbox. Now, although she has astonishingly improved, I do not know that I even like her. But she fascinates and interests me. I shall certainly see more of her. If I can like her well enough, and she will look at me — of which I am by no means sure — I fancy — I don't know — it may be that I shall marry her. At least she would do me credit and assist me in my career. She is ideally beautiful, uncommonly clever, she has the grand air, and she has millions. You are asking me to marry a

woman with less than half her fortune, whom smart Continental women would laugh at. I'd starve before I married a woman I should have to apologize for. No doubt I shall end by worrying along until Bridg drinks himself to death."

"I don't believe he is in any immediate danger — with that physique. And I had a remarkably lucid letter from him this morning. He wants me to try to persuade you to assist him in breaking the entail of Ordham — some rich brewer wants to buy it. Of course you will not?"

"I shan't even discuss the question."

Lady Bridgminster rose with an impatient jerk of her shoulders. As she stood there in the dim light, so long and narrow, draped, rather than dressed like ordinary women, she looked extraordinarily distinguished and handsome. Ordham's æsthetic sense stirred, and he put out his hand and took hers.

"We will pay those bills, somehow," he said. "I got a thousand from Bridg, and Hines, who has been adding up, finds that I overestimated my indebtedness. I will bring you two hundred this afternoon, and if ever I do marry riches, be sure that you and the boys shall have all you want."

A dark red tide rose to Lady Bridgminster's hair. She stooped impulsively and kissed her son. "You are a dear generous boy!" she exclaimed. "And we are all cats! cats! Every one of us."

And leaving her son puzzled as much by her unusual demonstration as by that cryptic arraignment of her sex, she swept her long draperies out of the room.

Ordham dined that evening in the beautiful house, which, under artificial light, looked more than ever a palace evoked by the stroke of a wand for a fairy princess to dwell in. The princess wore misty robes of white, with green leaves in her hair, her ethereal loveliness rendered almost nebulous by her mother's substantial gown of black jet, and the five big footmen in dark green plush. The dinner might have been sent over from Bignon's. Certainly these Americans knew how to spend their money. Their very newness inspired them to aim at effects that never would enter the old indifferent heads of the homogeneous races.

Mabel had almost nothing to say. She made no effort whatever, but Mrs. Cutting, accustomed all her life to lead in conversation, as well as to keep it from flagging, entertained the guest so conscientiously that he hardly had time to feel snubbed by the young beauty. Mrs. Cutting's talk rarely bored him, for she had a wide range of subjects and never clung too long to any one of them, after the fashion of some Americans, and he at least found time to realize that he could not have stood the same amount of chatter from a miss of one season. Mabel's new reticence became her, the more particularly as when she did speak it was to the point; and it was more and more apparent that she was not the charming little goose he had thought her in Munich. But he was taken aback, as they left the dining room, to receive a polite good night from the young lady, who floated down the long line of rooms and disappeared.

Mrs. Cutting bit her lip and tapped her fan in manifest annoyance as she led the way to the front drawing-room. "Mabel has a slight headache," she said apologetically. "She always droops a little in warm weather. She wants to return to the country; but I shall continue to be very frank with you, Mr. Ordham — I am most anxious that you should know one another."

"It looks as if the less she knows me the better she may like me." Ordham spoke with some humour; he was piqued but not angry. "However, I shall always be grateful to you for letting me look at her."

"Ah! You do think my chick a beauty?" There was a little break in Mrs. Cutting's cultivated voice, but she did not lift her eyes to Ordham's.

"I have never seen a girl half as beautiful."

Mrs. Cutting rose and moved about with uncommon restlessness. "Oh, if it could only be!" she cried. "Why not? Why not? I cannot live forever. The few relatives I have live in New York, and Mabel is so thoroughly Europeanized. She must marry. There is no other solution for a dainty helpless creature like that. Some man must take care of her as well as of her fortune. I have set my heart upon it, and I have had very few disappointments in

life. I really could not endure the failure of this darling project. And you two should be as mutually attracted as the first man and the first woman. I cannot understand it!"

"I can fancy myself feeling the full force of the attraction if encouraged a bit. But if Miss Cutting will not speak to or look at me —"

"Girls are the eternal enigmas — and the most provoking little beasts that nature ever invented. She was quite mad about you when we left Munich. Now she fancies that no man will ever come up to her ideal — whatever it may be! She has no inordinate social ambitions; titles here and in France have been offered to her. But let us not talk about it. Come and see me. I positively refuse to return to the country and the society of tutors. They can come here. If Mabel droops, she can take a tonic. I could remain in this London I adore, winter and summer, autumn and spring. . . . And who knows? All this indifference, this nonchalance, may be but a ruse to draw you on. No one knows a girl less than her mother. And as to girls in general — there is no end to their nonsense and affectations. Fortunately they outgrow them, or what would become of the race? Do light another cigarette and let us sit on the balcony. I am too old for moonlight and balconies, and shall only inspire you with vain regrets — but never mind. At least it will be pleasant for me, and unselfishness is good for the soul!"

XXXIV

WHERE IS ROSAMOND HAYLE?

ORDHAM was somewhat surprised that his mother did not inflict him with Rosamond Hayle at luncheon or dinner, and wondered if she had accepted the two hundred pounds in the nature of a bribe. He was more than grateful to be spared the sight of that high-born heiress's prominent teeth and leaden hair; but beyond forbearing to thrust the young woman upon him in person, Lady Bridgminster made no effort at self-abnegation. She talked of her Rosamond's virtues constantly and even hinted that hair could be "touched up." Bony structure was hopeless, but by an elaborate arrangement of red-brown tresses and large hats, front teeth could be thrown into the background, particularly when assisted by a pink and white complexion; and this, she pledged her word, the healthy English girl now possessed. Nor were her eyes at all bad, and she had eyebrows, which were a distinct advantage when fixing up a plain girl. As for figure — what were dressmakers for? Besides, these lovely æsthetic gowns were invented to make skeletons the fashion.

Ordham acquired a certain adroitness in changing the current of his mother's thought by introducing the subject of her poverty. This was real enough. Her father grew stingier day by day, and her mother, once the essence of worldliness (she, too, had been a beauty), now compromising with heaven through the expensive medium of royal charities, gave her smaller checks every year. How she lived at all heaven only knew. To be sure she had friends, and, thank God! was invited for Homburg or the Riviera every season, and never got round to the same country

houses two years in succession. But all that meant clothes, clothes! Heavens, how things did cost! Sometimes she had wished that the boys were girls, but think what *they* would have cost in clothes. And girls made slaves of their mothers. As to the boys, they were better off without her and could be kept in the country the year round. Their health was wonderful. If they had ever had even the measles or whooping-cough, she had not heard of it. Mortimer (the family solicitor) paid their bills.

If Lady Bridgminster had a preference for any of her children, for any mortal, indeed, save herself, it was for her oldest son, whom she understood in some things so well, and in others not at all. He was interesting, he never bored her. The other five were fine orthodox straightforward English boys, who were only happy when out of doors or satisfying their mighty appetites. She was a little uncomfortable about her second son, Stanley, now twenty-two, and, no doubt, expecting to be entertained in town occasionally. But until her brilliant eldest brought gold to the coffers Stanley must content himself where he was, and there was plenty of room for him, during his holidays, in the dower house. She ran down to see him occasionally, as well as to Kent, and the boys were immensely flattered; Stanley, in particular, when she honoured Sandhurst, showing her off to his companions with a pride not without its pathos. She would willingly have showered money on them, poor souls, and had the youngest up for the pantomimes; but what could she do?

Ordham went one day to visit his brothers. He was fond of them in the abstract, although after the first half hour he was at a loss for subjects of conversation and wearied of theirs. They were somewhat in awe of their magnificent brother, whom they regarded as the head of the family, Bridgminster being more or less of a myth to them. Ordham upon this occasion felt pride as ever in their fine manly appearance, but when the youngest frankly demanded tips was mortified not to be able to respond generously, and wished that he had not come. To them he stood in the shoes of their indulgent father; moreover,

Ordham was one of those unfortunate persons who, while possessing the very special gift of wearing new clothes for the first time as if they had been in his wardrobe for at least two months, yet impressed the beholder as a young man of unlimited income, and on the Continent sent the prices up in every shop he entered. He left the house in Kent so deeply vexed at being obliged to give his brothers silver instead of gold that he was in a frame of mind to call on Rosamond Hayle; but in London he found a note from his mother informing him that she had run down to Brighton for the night with that paragon, and he dismissed all things disagreeable from his mind and spent the evening with the Cuttings.

He had lunched or dined or driven with them every day for a fortnight, always entering the cool exquisite house with a sensation of gratitude, especially now that he spent his mornings in the Foreign Office, for the weather continued hot. And this house, with shades drawn and great bunches of flowers in priceless bowls, always struck him afresh as the most perfect setting possible for the young châtelaine, always drifting about in a pale diaphanous gown; she wore a new one every time he saw her. Mrs. Cutting invariably wore black, — jet, lace, or net, — and he sometimes wondered if she deliberately were making a foil of herself; she was still young enough to take pleasure in colours. This question did not give him pause, however, his mental processes being now wholly engaged with the riddle of his sentiments toward Mabel Cutting. Was he on the edge of love, at last? He had gone so far as to resolve to marry her if she would have him, for wed he must, and never could he hope to find another girl with so much to recommend her. But he was still reluctant to give up his liberty; could he but fall a victim to the grand passion, hesitation would be consumed, and he should count himself the happiest of mortals — that is, if she would accept him. He forced his mind to dwell upon her and angrily reproached himself for being as cold as a fish. That she interested and intrigued him beyond any girl he had ever met was indisputable, and he increasingly longed for talks alone with her, that he might explore the

tempting by-paths of that mind and character. But Mrs. Cutting was a stickler for the proprieties and did not believe in exposing young people to the criticism of servants. Occasionally Mabel enlivened and talked rapidly and pleasantly about a new play or a bit of news in the artist or social world, but soon relapsed into her usual dreamy silence and left the burden of the conversation to her mother. Once she deliberately picked up a book and read for an hour; and upon another occasion, when the weather was more than commonly warm, she took a little gold box from her pocket and powdered her nose. This Ordham found quite adorable, and was even fascinated by the independence that prompted her to turn from the conversation that did not interest her to the literature that did.

Mrs. Cutting was ever bright and entertaining, being a passed mistress of the art of small talk, but there were times when Ordham hated the sound of her voice, and was not sure whether his impatience were due to his desire to talk with the daughter, or to the possible fact that Margarethe Styr had spoilt him for the conversation of other women. Although grateful that she was not close enough to divert him from his purpose, he felt the sudden deprivation of her society; the more as her letters were brief and unsatisfactory. She was on her *Gastspiel* and the weather was very warm; but she promised him long letters upon her return to Munich — that is, unless he delightfully returned, as he had promised. This he now knew he should not do until he was safely married; but he was not the man to give his beloved friend a hint of the matrimonial state of his mind or the fluid condition of his affections. Styr pictured him dutifully dancing attendance upon his mother, who, for reasons, was detained in London.

Once he gently insinuated to Miss Cutting that he should like to read with her during the long afternoons, or at least discuss with her the books that occupied her morning hours. But to these hints she was impervious, and, by way of compensating him, Mrs. Cutting proposed a game of tennis every morning before his duties com-

menced. To this bait Ordham rose like a famished trout, and it somewhat surprised him that Mabel accepted the suggestion no less eagerly than himself. The three drove out to a court in Chelsea every morning at half-past eight, and he played for an hour or two with a radiant vision in a short skirt, a red jersey, and tumbling yellow hair. Mabel did not play a particularly good game, but her interest was youthful and eager, and her admiration of his so outspoken, when her manners, like her toilette, were in dishabille, that he wondered if there were no end to the charms of this remarkable girl.

XXXV

YOUTH

One Saturday morning, while dressing, Ordham received a note from Miss Cutting, which, in phrases as light and graceful as her handwriting, conveyed the information that her mother was in bed with a headache, and that unless dear Lady Bridgminster — who, she feared, no longer liked them — would consent to act as chaperon, their game of tennis must be postponed until Monday. He answered that he knew of nothing that would give his mother more pleasure, but as she always slept until ten he hesitated to awaken her. He was disconsolate, and so forth, and so forth. At eleven, he casually presented himself at the familiar door in Grosvenor Square, and upon being told that Mrs. Cutting was indisposed, entered, as a matter of course, waved the footman aside, and wended his way up to the music room, whence issued the strains of Chopin's *Impromptu in D.* He stood in the doorway until the unconscious Mabel had finished, listening critically, for Mabel had always refused to play for him. Ordham had no technical knowledge of music, but he had heard a great deal of it because it appealed powerfully to those tracts in his brain which were not mental; he therefore realized that if Mabel's performance lacked the subtle appeals that go with the velvet touch and depth of expression, there was no doubt of the correctness and brilliancy of her execution. He was rather gratified than otherwise at this lack of a quality that belonged to the maturer mind, not to innocent girlhood. When she had finished, he went forward, and she rose with a blush, the first with which she had favoured him. She looked startled, almost frightened.

"Mom — mother —" she began.

"You will forgive me? Please do. I really could not put in the whole day alone. If you turn me out, I shall be driven to accept an invitation to the country, and I should hate it. Come and talk to me for a bit."

His eyes coaxed even more than his voice. She led the way to the front drawing-room and seated herself in a chair beside the open window, her poise quite recovered, and talked to him with her inimitable girlish graciousness about nothing in particular. Her old loquacity was outgrown, it was evident; but with her mother ill and a guest on her hands, courtesy demanded that she should make an effort.

But Ordham was determined to seize this opportunity to explore her mind; he had come for no other purpose. Only for the moment was he content to sit and admire her, although she had never looked more like a lovely French princess; that puzzled one, perhaps, who asked why, since the mob had no bread, they did not eat cake. She wore a white gown with a blue sash and a blue ribbon in her hair. Her repose was extraordinary in so young a girl, but once or twice Ordham fancied he detected a nervous compression of her lips. Her large golden brown eyes, however, from which the dreams had been politely banished, smiled at him with a concentration singularly flattering after his many failures to capture even their wandering attention.

"I wish you would tell me what you read," he said abruptly; "I have wondered and wondered if you care for any of my favourites."

"I should never dare to tell you what mine are, for I am sure you would despise them. I happen to know what your favourites are — and I have been permitted to read only a few of the foreign classics — mother does not think I should. But books were made to be read and studied, not to be discussed; don't you think so? I am reading hard in the hope of one day becoming something more than a butterfly, but I have had so little time! Don't examine me!"

Ordham thought this enchantingly modest. "Why

should not we read together? There is so much I should like to get through, but one needs an incentive in this weather. That would be the strongest!"

An expression singularly like alarm flitted through those radiant orbs, but the explanation came in her cry: "Not yet! Not yet! When you come back to England next time. Then I shall know so much more. How perfectly wonderful of you to have passed those terrible examinations — I don't mean that it was wonderful for you, although so many fail, but you have so much to distract your mind from study. Where do you expect to go first?"

"Oh, St. Petersburg, Rome, Constantinople."

"It is like you not to want to go back to Paris or to be sent to Washington. All of those capitals must be so perfectly interesting."

It was a few moments before he realized that she had deftly led the conversation far from literature and was making him talk about himself. He deliberately returned to his exploitations, for nothing in life now interested him as much as the mind hidden behind that full luminous brow, those unfathomable eyes. He had taken a long drive the night before, thinking of Styr and sharply realizing that life without mental companionship would be insupportable. There had been a return of those half-comprehended mutterings of a deeper companionship still, and the whisper that Styr alone held the key to a locked room in his soul; but he was by no means inclined to force the lock and analyze the contents of that room, being vaguely but uneasily conscious that if he did he should suddenly find himself shot out of his present harbour into stormy seas. He had concluded that if this beautiful and accomplished girl really possessed an intellect that could be cultivated to understand and companion his own, and would marry him, he should be an ingrate to ask more of life.

"Why 'not yet'? Do you forget that I am only twenty-four? I really know nothing at all. If it were not for the fact *that nobody ever* forced me to study and I put in

a good part of the time reading in the library at Ordham, and again, if I had not happened to be much attracted by the Continental theatre, I should be quite ignorant."

"Really?" She opened her eyes at this paradoxical jumble in a fashion which suggested the old simile, "saucer." "You have the reputation of being quite too frightfully clever."

"I wish I were! It is merely that I am not athletic. All my numerous relations are, and they think that as I am not, I must have contracted the vice of brains. But it is all a mistake. I am sure you could teach me. Let us read Meredith together."

She looked as if about to cry. "I — I — have been dying to read Meredith," she faltered; "but mother does not think he is quite proper. She does not approve very much of novels, anyway. I console myself with history and memoirs, — and — and — I — well —"

Her cheeks were stained with a beautiful color. She dropped her long eyelashes, hesitated for a full minute, during which Ordham — why, he could not define — held his breath, then raised her eyes to his with a glance of dazzling, of unmistakable coquetry. Its effect, after her long period of indifference, was electrical, and the remark which followed that direct appeal of youth to youth made him turn white.

"Let us talk about that fortnight in Munich," she almost whispered. "I was so desperately in love with you, poor little soul; and you — you were not quite indifferent. You might have written me one little letter."

"I — I —" he stammered. "I banished your memory. It was my only refuge. I should not have learned the little German I did. I should have followed you —"

"I am glad that you did not. I was such a little goose —"

"You were enchanting!"

She shook her head. "But only for two weeks! Otherwise, German or not, you would have followed. Even now, I am afraid you think me stupid; but at least I have learned not to bore people when they can listen to mother. Besides,

she does not approve of girls talking very much. But I have thought of ten thousand things I should love to talk to you about. Books? Oh, that is only one. Of course I cannot think of any of them now. That is always the way."

"You might have given me a glance once in a while to let me know you recognized my existence! I have always been made to feel that I was exclusively your mother's friend."

"Well—" She lifted her shoulder in the French manner which expresses many words. Then her eyes discarded coquetry and became sombre. "One hates the idea of being put on exhibition. That was spared me until you came. But of course you know—you would be a fool if you didn't—that mother is dying to have us marry. That is enough to make a girl hate a man. But now that I can see you don't care a bit about it, I like you much better." And she rewarded him with the sweetest smile he had ever seen.

Ordham was cold from head to foot, but he answered steadily: "But I do care about it. I want to marry you very much."

"Oh!" She pouted until her lips looked so kissable that Ordham flushed darkly. Then she became dignified and reserved once more. It was as if she dropped a veil before all that was still too young in her, and became the maiden of many millions and superior mind. But he saw that she clenched her hands in a fold of her gown to keep them from shaking.

"Are you proposing?" she asked gently.

"Is that the tone you assume when about to refuse a man?"

"I don't think I ever want to marry."

"Nor did I until I met you. I hated the thought of it."

"I don't mean—I mean that one should love very much to marry. That seems more difficult than learning Chopin or—or—literature! All girls dream of the prince—but he does not seem to come to me."

"You just told me that you were fond of me once."

"Oh, at that age! It is quite ten years ago. I like to have you come here — oh, immensely! But love!"

"Then you do not hate me? Sometime I have felt sure that you did."

"Sometimes I have. As I said — no girl enjoys being thrown at a man's head. I feared you would think I had a hand in it."

"I never flattered myself."

"Then you really are unlike other men."

"Do you care for any one else?"

"Oh, no. I have an American cousin, Bobby Driscom, who is arriving in a week or so from New York. He and his father are bankers and take care of our affairs. I used to think him handsomer than any god could possibly be, but I have not seen him for two years."

Ordham experienced such torments of jealousy that he bit his lips and and beat a tattoo on the floor with his foot. "Does that mean — Tell me — do you dislike me now that you find I want to marry you? You said that my only charm —"

"Was that you were not in love with me."

"But I am!"

"I think you only want to marry me — as you put it before. I won't say a word about my horrid money, because I know perfectly well you would not marry for that alone. But you think I would make a good all-round wife for a diplomat —"

"How can you say such things?"

"I really think I should. And I am positive that you do not love me — yet, at all events. I may not be quite nineteen, but I have had a good many men in love with me, all the same. They began while I was in short frocks and wore my hair in plaits. If I don't know much about anything else, I am not quite a fool on that subject. Ah, here is luncheon being announced and I cannot ask you to stop. How hateful are all these little *convenances* that hedge a girl about!" She rose and held out her hand. "But we will play tennis on Monday? Meanwhile do not *let us think* of such serious things as love and marriage.

Youth does not last so very long. When you are thirty and I am twenty-four, come and propose to me again. And please, please do not tell mother that you proposed to me to-day, or I shall not have a happy time. Mother is sweet and dear, but when she sets her mind upon a thing — Will you promise?"

"Of course. But I don't intend to wait until I am thirty to propose again."

He was dismissed with a bewildering, tantalizing smile beneath sad, unfathomable eyes, that sent him up the wrong street and caused him nearly to be run down twice by hansom cabs.

XXXVI

THE RACE

During the ensuing fortnight he looked as if a blight had passed over him. His face grew pinched and white, he lost his magnetism, his fine remote dignified assurance, even his good manners. His mother, in as superb an outburst of disdain as he had ever witnessed on the stage, told him that the very cabbies, to say nothing of the servants, must see that he was in the throes of his calf-love, and that he was even more odious than young men usually were during that last and worst of children's diseases; thanking her stars that she was not forced to remain under the same roof with him, she flounced off to Paris with Rosamond Hayle. Ordham, could he have experienced pleasure in anything during this excruciating period, would have felt delight in being rid of her.

Alas! he could no longer flatter himself with doubts regarding his feeling for the young American beauty, indulge in mental analyses. He had forgotten Styr, his ambitions, his calm belief in himself and his star. But one woman, one object, existed on this earth for him, and he only paused to wonder that he had ever thought himself incapable of love. No man ever got sharper wounds from the archaic darts. He was sentimentally, passionately, wretchedly in love. He thought of nothing else. For the first time in his life appetite and sleep were affected. Several people from whom he had received much hospitality while in Paris paid a short visit to London and sought him out as a matter of course. He took no notice of them. Styr, at last, found time to write him a long letter. He did not

even read it. He forgot the existence of the Foreign Office.

Meanwhile, he saw the young lady daily. If she had been merely indifferent before, she was now almost rude, regretting, no doubt, her girlish recrudescence. Mrs. Cutting, were it possible, was even more impressive in her attentions to him. He felt as if tossed between fire and ice, and although this torment had its fascination, he sometimes wished that the mother would gratify the daughter and turn him out. Then he could flee to the ends of the earth, and make some attempt to extinguish the flames that devoured him. He was quite aware of his changed appearance, and one morning, while brushing his hair and scowling at his nervous white face, recalled what Styr had said about young people in the ferment of first love being the mere victims of the race, reversions to type. That, no doubt, was what was the matter with him, and it was no consolation to reflect that it was so much good passion thrown away. If a man had to undergo such torments, why, in heaven's name, didn't the girl catch the fever? He should not in the least mind being one of Nature's victims if he were permitted to be happy with a fellow-victim. Otherwise, there was no sense in it.

The tennis games were abandoned, as he slept late after his bad nights, and Hines, after one conscientious attempt to awaken him, declined the office of mentor a second time. But he spent a part of every day in Grosvenor Square, from which he could not keep away; although he believed that no old-time martyr boiling in a cauldron and pinched with red-hot nippers ever suffered such agonies as his. But at last pride revolted, his spirit cried out under its crushing load, and he had an attack of acute indigestion. He pointedly broke an engagement for luncheon, and presented himself at five o'clock determined to say good-by and leave England next day. He should not return to Munich, for he never wanted to see another woman; probably he should go out to India and remodel himself upon the commonplace family likeness by shooting tigers and sending home the skins.

The ladies were shopping, he was informed, and he was shown up to the small drawing-room to await them. But the small drawing-room would not hold him, and he roamed about the beautiful rooms whose furniture and decorations had once whispered to him of sweet love-tragedies, as well as of terrible dramas involving the collapse into blood or obscurity of the historic families that had loved them. But to-day they had no confidences for Ordham. He came upon a door ajar. It led into a small room that he had never seen, but he did not hesitate to enter, as Mrs. Cutting had made him feel at home long since. He saw at a glance that this must be Mabel's boudoir, and drew back. Beyond the threshold, however, he was powerless to retreat; he stood trembling, fascinated, feeling himself in the presence of a subtle betrayal of the secrecies of maidenhood, — such as he sometimes fancied emanated from the young girl herself. He had never dreamed that a girl could be so sacred and beautiful, so mysterious a creature. He turned pale and lost his breath.

It was a very simple room to his masculine eye, with its white flowered silks and white enamelled furniture, but as unmistakably luxurious as the rest of the house. Suddenly his eye was caught by a bookcase above the writing table. This temptation was irresistible, and in a moment he was eagerly scanning the titles of the haughty beauty's chosen literature. It was with something of a shock that he discovered the books to be the essays of Macaulay, the novels of Scott and Dickens, and a selected volume of Shakspere's plays, as he had read all of these works and more in his earliest teens. It could not be possible that this represented the girl's idea of erudition, her mother's disappointment in her beauty's untimely development of bookish tastes? But what of it? Ordham was too far gone in love and despair to be seriously affected by a minor disappointment, although it might have staggered him a month earlier. Poor ambitious child! What opportunities at a fashionable school in Paris, studying "art," music, and three languages, to delve into literature! If she had but just begun to read, at least she had not begun with trash, and that she had begun at

all was the vital point. Again he was turning away, and again he received a shock. The drawer of the desk was half open. His gaze, as it dropped from the bookcase, rested upon three letters from his mother. The ink was fresh. The postmark was conspicuously "Paris."

He afterwards described his sensations at that moment as of a lighted torch trying to force its way from the base of his skull through the dull inert mass of his brain to his upper consciousness. But at a certain stage love is a disease analogous to death. The brain, if not disintegrated, is very nearly so, for it is worn out by implacable thought, despair, brooding on the impossible. It is, after long tension, a flabby mass, through which the angry watchers in the subconsciousness can find no avenue, force not a cry of warning. Normally with a brain so alert that the utmost caution and tact were necessary in the handling of him, even although his full share of masculine vanity made him as easy game as most men, the least slip would have roused Ordham's suspicions and set him on his guard; but, his brain demoralized by the greensickness of love, he was as far beyond rescue as if he had been born a fool.

He was staring stupidly at the letters, mechanically striving to reach their significance, when a footstep on the polished floor of the drawing-room made him retreat hastily, trembling at the prospect of confronting the indignant Mabel and receiving summary dismissal. So great was his discomposure he did not notice that the footsteps were too heavy for a woman, and was astonished to confront a young man, an uncommonly good-looking young man, with a frank well-bred face and an athletic spare figure. Ordham divined at once that here was the handsome American cousin whose advent he had dreaded. Unconsciously he threw back his own shoulders. His eyes became excessively cold, his manner almost unbearably polite.

"No doubt you are Mr. Driscom," he said. "Mrs. Cutting has spoken of you to me."

"And you are Mr. Ordham, of course." The American shook the Englishman warmly by the hand, but received

no sort of pressure in response. He wondered, as he had done during previous visits to London, what American women could see in Englishmen.

"Mrs. Cutting is my second cousin," he said. "She has often mentioned you in her letters. The butler tells me they will be back in a moment. I suppose we may smoke."

His voice was agreeable and cultivated, his manner easy and cordial. Ordham noticed with intense annoyance that there was nothing here to ridicule and despise. Margarethe Styr had talked to him of this fine type of the young American, and Driscom reminded him of the gallant youth who had stood by her to the last on the wrecked steamer. He felt that in ordinary circumstances he should have warmed to him, but now he hated and feared him; were thought as potent as one day it may be, poor Driscom would have expired of poison in every vein.

But the American, who seemed drawn to that courteous smiling exterior, talked amiably of the yachting news in the evening telegrams, and of yachting in general, smoking steadily the while. It was manifest that he felt quite at home, was doing the honors, in fact! No doubt he would be staying in the house, these Americans were so infernally hospitable.

Fortunately the tête-à-tête was not long enough to exhaust Ordham's falling stock of patience. Mrs. Cutting swept into the room, followed by Mabel and LaLa. Driscom sprang to his feet and kissed his second cousin warmly. Ordham held his breath, expecting to commit murder were Mabel also saluted. When the young lady merely held out her hand with a radiant smile, his apprehension increased. A kiss might have meant nothing. Were they not cousins and old friends? This formality — before him — might be portentous.

But Mrs. Cutting gave him little time for thought. She apologized for being late, dilated upon "their" disappointment at his desertion of them earlier in the day, and insisted that he remain informally for dinner. He replied with cold decision, and with a full return of his old dignity, that

he must "wander along," as he was dining with some friends and had promised to look in upon others. "People were returning to town." He had made up his mind that he would not even tell them of his intended departure; a note posted at the station would suffice. Mrs. Cutting, who had regarded him intently, laid her hand firmly on his arm. "I shall not let you go yet awhile," she said. "I must confer with Bobby at once, so that he may cable to-night, and meanwhile please talk to Mabel until I can come back and pour out the tea."

She gave him no chance to reply. Taking "Bobby" by the arm, she swept him out the room, darting a swift look of command at her daughter.

Mabel turned pale, but she came forward with her usual girlish grace. "Do sit down," she said. "You look as if you never intended to sit down again."

"It is not worth while to sit down — to detain you. I really must go."

"You don't intend to come back!"

He looked steadily into her dilated eyes, wondering if he hated her, and betrayed himself. "No," he said. "I shall not come back." Then he paused abruptly, and physically braced himself. She had dropped her eyelashes, and he was quite prepared for the coquettish net that would float from those slowly uplifting orbs. But when he met them, he saw only terror and appeal. Mabel's face looked suddenly pinched and white. Then she burst into tears, and he was swept on that flood straight through the gates of Paradise.

When they descended to earth and were seated on a little sofa in the remotest corner, he demanded an explanation of the torments imposed upon him during the past fortnight. "You say you have always loved me," he said with automatic masculine logic. "Why, in heaven's name, didn't you accept me the first time?"

"I couldn't be sure — that you really loved me — you seemed to me to be taken by surprise. Besides, I think I wanted to punish you for not having loved me all that long time. I had to be rude and horrid — it was that or

betray myself. I don't think I ever believed that you really loved me till just now. I don't believe you knew it yourself."

"Oh, yes, I did," he replied grimly. "I was so far gone that I became utterly uninteresting."

"No — but you made me believe that you were miserable because you had proposed to me impulsively and could not think of a way out of it. My only consolation was that I had refused you. But I was ashamed every time I thought of how I had led you on that day — and I had vowed never to be silly and flirt again. And then — well, it cannot be denied that mother has thrown me at your head, and that made me really hate you at times, so that it was easier to be rude."

"Your mother was beautifully frank." Ordham was somewhat confused by the number of apologetic reasons advanced, but wholly happy. They talked more or less wildly for an hour. Then Ordham, hearing the swish of Mrs. Cutting's gown, stood up, flushed and nervous, but so determined not to look sheepish, that he was as formal as an aged diplomatist when his future mother-in-law took both his hands and looked at him with eyes that were really soft. "Thank heaven!" she said with the simplicity appropriate to great moments. "I know that you will both be happy. And how grateful I am that you have not put off making up your minds any longer. Bobby tells me that I must go to New York. It is imperative. But now I can leave Mabel with you, instead of drying her eyes and distracting her mind for six months, when I should be giving all my attention to business."

Of course he remained to dinner, and before he left he had another half-hour alone with Mabel. An excellent repast, the interesting conversation of Driscom, whom he now liked as much as he had hated a few hours earlier, unruffled bliss, and the prospect of almost immediate marriage, had clarified and braced his normally acute and steady brain. They were sitting among the fragrant flowers of the balcony when he told her abruptly of his incursion into her private little domain, and added: "As

it has excited my curiosity, I may as well tell you at once that I saw several letters from my mother in the drawer of your desk, and ask you to explain. I do not want to be annoyed by petty imaginings. You don't mind?"

The hand he held had grown cold, but when he turned his head he met suffused and smiling eyes.

"I might as well confess! I wrote to Lady Bridgminster imploring her to withdraw her opposition — not to hate me — I know how great her influence over you is —"

"She has not a particle of influence over me. What did she reply? How enchanting of you!"

"Oh, she was quite nice. I believe she said that she had washed her hands of the matter of your marriage, since you would not marry Lady Rosamond. Should you like to read the letters?" She half rose.

"Of course not." And knowing somewhat of the fecundity of the feminine pen, it did not strike him as odd that his mother should have found it worth while to write this epitome of her disgust three times.

XXXVII

ORDHAM CEASES TO BE ORIGINAL

For a day or two Ordham could hardly believe in his good fortune, so suddenly had it descended upon him. When separated from Mabel he moved as in a dream, looking preternaturally serious lest he wear a fatuous grin. But this phase passed and he settled down to the business of being supremely happy, or as happy as possible while happiness was still incomplete. He thanked the American fates for the business complications that called Mrs. Cutting to New York and hastened the wedding, which was to take place early in October. Lady Bridgminster had written two frigid letters of congratulation, which Ordham and Mabel smilingly compared; but, being in Paris, graciously offered to confer with the great milliner who had the honour of dressing the young beauty, and spare her and her mother the miseries of crossing the Channel and of French hotels.

Ordham had never felt so young. Having cared little for girls and greatly for women of the world, he had been, and in spite of his precocity and cleverness, under an unconscious strain for several years past. He had always been "playing up," as Hélène Wass once expressed it, when she may have felt — who knows? — a moment's pity for him. Now, he had the sensation that Life, having long cheated him, was making sudden and wondrous restitution. It was that perfect flower of youth in Mabel that called to him as potently as her beauty and her high-bred grace and charm. He no longer cared what she read; she declared herself too happy to think of books, and he replied that they were writing a great romance of their own; time enough for other men's unlifelike vapourings later. He did

not see her often alone, and these sweet brief interviews gave a romantic intensity to their engagement which London might not have offered to a pair less severely chaperoned; although, to be sure, that exotic mansion, with its imported atmosphere of vanished Bourbons and their reckless nobles, exorcised the memory of grimy London, and was a poem in itself. Even in imagination he always saw her drifting about the lovely bright rooms with her eyes full of dreams. She treated him to a bewildering variety of moods, sometimes even chattering for a few moments quite like the old Mabel, only to melt insensibly into the dignified and stately girl he longed to exhibit to every court in Europe. Not only was he fully roused from the long lethargy of his youth and alive as he had fancied he might be at thirty, but the romantic cravings born during his extraordinary experience with Margarethe Styr were eager, hungry, almost satisfied. Only that wondrous period prosaically known as the honeymoon could perfect this poem of the prince and princess of fairy lore.

It never occurred to him to wonder if he could have loved Mabel Cutting had she been a poor girl and he forced to give up his diplomatic ambitions and support her, or if he had met her only in commonplace hotel sitting-rooms. The exquisite creature's very wealth was a part of her romantic fascination. It furnished the halo. It created, as with a magic wand, the poetic setting for her aristocratic beauty and grace. It moved her aloof from those common mortals whose gilded cages were stuffed with unpaid bills. That his life with her was to be free of those vulgar cares which his temperament held in particular abhorrence, added to the ecstasy, to the belief that they two were of the elect, chosen to dwell upon a rarefied plane, to experience a superior and perennial happiness.

It was quite ten days before he remembered Margarethe Styr. Then he sat down at once to write to her of his engagement, that she might not hear of it first through the public channels; it was to be announced as soon as the invitations were engraved. He found this letter the most difficult he had ever attempted to write. Even as he took

up his pen that something he still did not wish to define stirred in the deeps of his mind, whispered that he had committed an act of infidelity. Never until that moment had he realized how close and deep his intimacy with Styr had been. It was, as she herself had called it, a mental marriage. There was no doubt that in a sense he had given himself to her, that he had intended to keep her always and first in his life, that he had vaguely looked forward to some ultimate union with her. The possibility of falling in love with the girl possessing the requisite millions had never occurred to him. But Margarethe Styr had gone out of his life. There was no possible doubt on that point. He no longer felt the slightest need of her. Henceforth he should be absorbed in his young wife and in his career. Mabel would become one of the cleverest women in Europe and give him all the inspiration he needed in that future of which she even now talked with such enthusiasm and intelligence. Friendships with other women would be superfluous and imprudent. Styr belonged to the past, and while he should cherish her memory, she must be content to reign in memory alone.

He spent the entire morning groaning at his desk, but finally concocted a letter that he dared to send to Munich. Far too astute to indulge in rhapsodies, and at the same time too much in love to be dishonest, he hedged between an avowal and a denial of his affection for the great heiress whom he shortly was to have the honour of leading to the altar. But although it was a very creditable performance, that letter, he was all youth and love and fire when he wrote it, and his pen conducted more than one flash from his electrified being. A woman far less keen than Styr would hardly have been persuaded that he was reluctantly steering into matrimony through the golden gate, barely conscious of his partner in the sordid transaction.

XXXVIII

ISOLDA FURIOSA

FROM the instant that Isolde raised herself slowly from the couch on the ship's deck the great audience that Styr's performances always called forth knew that some unusual influence was at work upon the impersonation. Not even in that first silent moment was there the reading of a princess whose tormented spirit had not permitted her to sleep since she had left her father's shores. At once there was such an expression of fury, of murderous hate, in those immense pregnant eyes, such an aura of primal devastating force emanated from the strained body, the fixed features, that hardly a person in the house but stirred uncomfortably. This was no indignant princess weary with night-watches, whose wrongs would gradually set her brain on fire; here was the infuriated woman out of leash, a woman that might have been suckled by a tigress and forgotten what little she had ever known of civilization. "Brangäne" said afterward that she was afraid to approach her; and had not the audience focussed their attention wholly upon Styr, they might have noticed that the poor little mezzo sang off the key twice.

When Isolde — who had even lifted herself and shown her face sooner than was customary, had stared for long insupportable moments while the sailors sang the careless satirical words of their song, "Oh, Irish maid! My winsome Irish maid!" — sprang to her feet, crying, "What wight dares insult me?" her great voice seemed to ring through all Munich. "Brangäne, ho!" she shouted. "Where sail we?"

Brangäne articulated that bluish stripes were visible

in the west, that the ship fast approached the land. When Isolde bore down upon her, demanding in a still more terrible voice, "What land?" neither she nor the audience ever knew whether or not she managed to warble, "Cornwall's verdant strand," for Styr, barely waiting for the line to finish, towered in the centre of the stage and shrieked in tones of loosed fury and prophecy, that not even the golden quality of her voice could soften:

"Nevermore! To-day nor to-morrow!"

Then the minion, having given the necessary cue, Isolde hurled forth, in tones which seemed to express the gnashing of teeth, her wild regret for those lost arts that would have enabled her to annihilate the earth and every hated mortal on it. Discarding the cultivated gestures with which she so subtly suggested repressed power, growing passion, she tossed her arms aloft, and with eyes burning and face convulsed, declaimed in a voice that was strangely like a roar:

"Oh, subtle art of sorcery, awake in me once more power of will! Hark to my bidding, fluttering breezes! Arise and storm in boisterous strife! With furious rage and hurricane's hurtle, awaken the sea from its calm! Rouse up the deep to its devilish deeds. Fling it the prey I gladly offer!"

The poverty of Wagner's literary gift, apart from mere word jugglery, was never so manifest, nor his sublime faculty of imagining and delineating character in the terms of music; never had singer, not even Styr, rendered any words so unnecessary and sent the purport streaming out from her mind, her throat, with such terrific force. More than one in that spellbound audience half expected to see the roof of the opera house come down, at the very least to hear the noise of thunder above the orchestra. When she gasped: "Air! air! or my heart will choke! Open, open there wide!" the fine ladies in the *balkon* felt for their smelling-salts. When Brangäne, having drawn aside the curtain, and Isolde, with a face that looked like death set in stone, commanded her to summon Tristan, that Germanic mass of flesh visibly trembled, and he asserted afterward that he had hardly dared to disobey her.

"Go! Order him! And *understand it!* I, Isolde, do command it!" The tones, growing rough and dark, expressed that the limits of endurance had been reached in a queen holding the power of life and death in her twitching hands, and it tried the courage of a mere actor to stand firmly at the helm.

By this time not one in the audience — outside of Italy the most musically receptive in the world, in spite of the sandwiches in their petticoat pockets and their unquenchable thirst — was sitting in a natural position. All were strained forward; all, with what power of thought was left in them, questioning whether the Styr were giving a new and sensational rendering of Isolde's character, or if something had occurred to excite her beyond bounds and she were venting her anger in the sympathetic rôle. If so, what was it? Could she be in love with the tenor, she, the great Styr? And had he, the good devoted husband, trifled with and flouted her? But these speculations were barely formulated until later, when they were feverishly discussing the phenomenon; all were held, thrilled, half fearing that something real and terrible was about to happen before their eyes, vaguely apprehensive that never again would a stage performance satisfy their deep and persistent craving for vicarious emotions.

When Isolde rushed to the back of the pavilion and flung herself against the curtain to shriek out her curses, she almost swept Brangäne into the wings, and left but little enthusiasm in that now terrified artist to "throw herself upon Isolde with impetuous tenderness," to ejaculate admiration and consolation. She, at least, knew that Styr was not deliberately giving an intensified rendering of the great rôle, but was in a mood to kill somebody. She shivered for her neck; those long working fingers looked like flexible steel.

"Curse him, the villain! Curses on his head! Vengeance! Death! Death for both of us!" Styr might have been setting free the pent-up demons in the hearts of all the women, good and bad, on the surface of the globe, and perchance those in the audience that had no such

blessed means of relief gave a deep unconscious sigh of satisfaction.

When she gloated over the phial containing the death potion, Brangäne's apprehensions were not quelled until she had informed herself that it was really empty, for by this time she was convinced that there was a feud to the death between the *hochdramatisch* and the tenor — tremblingly awaiting his cue without.

There was no subtle hypnotic suggestion of death tonight in Styr's gestures. Her art was no longer under the command of her will, but she radiated death and damnation as Tristan entered, and for years after he told of his conviction that the *Todesmotif* in the orchestra was his own dirge, and resigned himself to die as he lifted the fatal goblet to his lips. He believed that she had rubbed poison on the rim, whose very fumes would rise and slay him even although he forbore to touch it; and his quivering nerves were untranquillized by the knowledge of his innocence: might she not have loved him long in secret and resented his virtuous indifference? Even when, the love potion working, she rushed into his arms, he said that the hate in her eyes never abated for a second and he expected her to bite or strangle him.

But at last the act, with its insupportable excitement, was over, and the audience, almost hysterical, forgot their accustomed refreshment as they stood by their seats or paced the foyer, discussing the extraordinary performance and wishing their King were present. They could arrive at no conclusion save that Styr was the greatest actress even Germany had ever seen, whether something had happened to put her into an awful temper or not.

In the second act, there being no opportunity to express either hatred or fury, it would seem that Styr was bent upon demonstrating that the artist in her could not long be submerged by any turmoil in the woman. Never had she sung her part in the love duet with a more poignant sweetness, a more perishing languor, although she would not permit the tenor to come within a foot of her. She did not rise to real greatness, however, until the third act, when,

in the last lines of the *Liebestod*, she stood with rigid body and strained upraised face, every line in both, every round noble vibrant tone, expressing the savage exultation of that tormented spirit at the approach of death. As she sank upon Tristan, who had one eye open, King Mark and his men watched her narrowly, for everybody on the stage was uneasy, half fearing that this terrifying creature, always an alien in their midst, but awaited the final moment to wreak her vengeance. When the tenor reached his stuffy ugly little flat that night he overwhelmed his Frau with caresses, and sat until nearly morning eating and drinking, the happiest man in Munich.

XXXIX

PEGGY HILL AND MARGARETHE STYR

Styr locked herself in her gallery and wondered if she were alive or a walking automaton. Her passion had expended itself, the blood had left her brain, but she was filled to the brim with a sullen, silent, deadly rage — curiously mixed with disappointment and regret. For nearly nine years, in a life ordered to please herself, with not an outer disturbing force, save only an occasional tilt with the opera house cabal, or a fit of temper after a performance, quickly forgotten, with not a disturbance from within, for she had buried the past, trained her powerful will to banish all such futilities as regret, she had aimed not only to lead an ideal life but to perfect and ennoble her character. Although she had been almost a recluse, she had helped many young people with promising voices, and her purse was always open to the unfortunates in the chorus. Perhaps she had deliberately kept her humanity alive by these acts of kindness and sympathy, knowing that there was danger to art in the drying up of the springs of human nature. Perhaps; she could not tell; did not care. But at least she had led not only a blameless, a kindly, an inspiring, a finely mental and nobly artistic life, but she had achieved what she knew to be happiness, and this by the sealing up of her inner kingdom.

It is easy to ignore the inner kingdom so long as no man enters it. It is easy to be impersonal, mental, a consummate devotee of art so long as the heart and soul and passions encounter no powerful disturbing force. Nothing so astonished and shocked her in these comparatively calm moments as the discovery that art was not all, that common primitive instincts were stronger in the final test than the

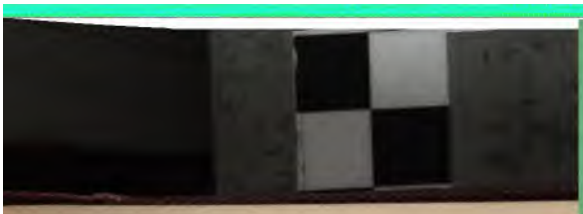
elevated choice of the brain supported by genius and will. So profound had been her contempt for human weakness, her loathing for men, so exalted, so triumphant her progress in that great sphere to which her voice had given her the golden key, that she had believed herself to be elevated permanently to a plane high above the common. She had never closed her eyes to the very second-rate clay of which most musicians were composed, both mental and moral, but she had been as serenely aware of her superior intellectual gifts, of a will stronger than any she had ever encountered, as she had been of her voice, her dramatic genius; and she had never even speculated upon a possible descent from that glorious plane where she dwelt alone with her art. She was a woman, after all, and she so abhorred herself that, had she possessed the sorceries of Isolde's ancestors, she would have obliterated Earth from the cosmic scheme.

She had received Ordham's letter a few moments before departing for the opera house, and the same post brought a note from Princess Nachmeister, announcing that "our *jüngling, Gott sei dank*, was really engaged to the American heiress of forty million marks, and was the more riveted to his bargain — that charming uncertain youth! — by being madly, nay absurdly, in love with the ravishing beauty." Then the blood had gone to Styr's head.

Even now she wondered if she really loved Ordham, for she was sensible of none of that organic craving which once alone would have distinguished one man from another in her imperial regard. At this moment, indeed, she did not love him at all; she hated him with a passion which, if stilled by exhaustion, was none the less volcanic, eloquent of the tremendous upheaval in her nature. But she was too wise not to suspect that it was the hatred which is merely love reversed. It would pass, her very mental balance would see to that; and what then? Hers had not been the experience of love in its infinite variety, and she stared out at the dark future with the first real fear of her life. During her long intimacy with Ordham she had been fully conscious that she had never liked any one half as

well, never drawn as close to any mortal spirit. When he had gone, she had had time for but a brief reaction from her perverse feminine exultation in renewed freedom, in the luxury of missing him, for she had left almost immediately for Switzerland, then on her second *Gastspiel*. Even so she had missed him, and had thought of him tenderly, hoped that he would keep his word and return to Munich. But she had been very busy, very uncomfortable, very much diverted, and the ovations she received had put all other wants in her soul to sleep. It was not until she was again in Munich, in the house which he still pervaded, where she saw him in his characteristic attitudes, heard his mellow English voice with its languid drawl and impatient breaks, that her vague sense of loss had grown poignant. But even that had been tempered before long by a gentle melancholy, a new sensation and not unpleasant, for the ego likes to run the gamut; and the certainty that he would return to Munich from time to time had further mitigated that deep sense of loss. She even hoped, or thought she did, that he would marry well, be delivered of the belittling embittering want of money; nothing could interfere with their friendship, or whatever it was. She, too, was possessed by the uneasy sense that it was something more, but even as the days passed and she finally became restless, more and more disturbed, coming out of her sleep sometimes with a sense of actual terror, she would not permit her thought to enter the analytical zone, the word love to rise before the judgment seat.

And had it been love? This was the question which now shook her puzzled and tortured brain, and banished all hope of sleep. Was it but an imperious pride outraged, a secure sense of possession shattered, that had lashed her into a berserk rage? Vanity, perhaps, that had been fed and watered into an abnormal growth for twenty-four years, first by the power she wielded over men, then by the far more heady incense of the public, — could that be it, mere vanity screaming with rage at this defeat by a silly little American girl? She knew the type, had seen hundreds of them in her many trips to Paris; moreover,



she had seen this Mabel Cutting several times during the conspicuous beauty's sojourn in Munich, she had sat almost beside her at a performance of *Fidelio* one night. The girl was beautiful and patrician, no doubt accomplished as girls ran; she was the sort that the American youth was falling in love with every hour, but she was not the girl to bewitch John Ordham, for the type was shallow, vain, soulless, hopelessly unintellectual. If he had fallen a victim to the race, he must have been engineered by very clever women. She knew him well enough to be sure that, left to himself, although he might have thought it best to marry the girl, he never would have fallen in love with her — the real Mabel Cutting — unless something besides gold dust had been thrown into his eyes. There had been extraordinarily clever scheming somewhere. She could but guess its nature, but she knew Ordham. His mind had artfully been lulled, and his mere youth and sex manipulated with the modern sorceries of tact and diplomacy.

And the real Ordham belonged to her. The blood rose to her head once more as she was forced to admit that the fine flower of his awakening would not be hers, was irretrievably given to a little fool whom he would hate, not merely tire of, before a year was out.

And this she could have had. She knew it now as she recalled certain moments when she had caught him looking at her with heavy eyes, or a strange stare as of something stirring and quivering in the depths of his being. But she had slurred over these dangerous moments, and without so much as a flush of self-consciousness. Not only had she finished with the masculinities, but she was not the woman to want the love she must rouse, engineer, reveal to itself. With all her tyrannous strength of will she was woman personified, and she must be wooed and won imperiously, or she should prefer to love alone.

She ground her teeth and beat the floor with her foot, and reverted to the vernacular of her youth, as she anathematized her inconsistency, her dog-in-the-manger attitude. Had Ordham appeared before her at that moment, she would not even have considered marriage with

him, would have hesitated long before committing herself to the less binding relation. Not only had she no desire to wreck his career, but she was not sure even now that she should greatly care if she went to her grave without having touched his lips. But he was hers. Inside that charming flesh was a John Ordham that no other woman would ever glimpse, that never would attain full growth save in contact with the woman so jealously hidden within her own noncommittal shell.

It was her first definite experience of the sovereign demands of the soul, of the recognition of the ego, that invisible entity which makes itself so uncomfortable in its earthly home until released by disease or decay. Were the needs of this God-in-little more lasting and determined than those of the affections, the body? Infinite, perhaps? In that case what should she do? what should she do?

She paced up and down the room as a new thought tormented her. This girl? What were most girls at that age but little fools, particularly if pretty and rich? Had not all women once been silly girls? Suppose this lovely creature, under the tutelage of John Ordham and the brilliant society in which she was to spend her most plastic years, should develop into a clever, intellectual, subtle woman? Then, what of her, Margarethe Styr, a fixture in Munich, an outcast from the circles of which this girl would become a component part? She stretched out her arms and opened and shut her long flexible hands. If Mabel Cutting had chanced to sing the part of Brangäne to-night she would have been strangled in view of all Munich. Oh, no doubt of that! It was as well indeed that the young lady was in London.

All these years of proud mental development, of devotion to her art, the abrupt but uninterrupted sequence to those terrible forty hours in the bony clutch of death, — all, then, were as naught? The evil, the appalling passions of her nature, were but the stronger for their long sleep. All her new life had done for her was to develop a new sort of love capacity with terrors and torments to which the old were but the brief aberrations of a superior beast. Love!

Love! She had never even guessed the meaning of the word before. She hated Ordham so desperately that she would have liked to twist her fingers about his own neck; but again she realized, with a sharp expulsion of the breath, that this was but the upheaval of the volcano's mud and poisonous gases preceding the liberation of the incandescent fires. But while possibly she might not fall into rage again, she must pass through other phases whose mere faint cries for liberty, for birth, terrified her. She was face to face with the greatest of all the mysteries in the always nebulous region of love, an experience known to few, either because they are not developed enough or because they have never met their peer.

She and Ordham were one. He would not appreciate his loss, for he was young, there was too much life before him, too many phases, the prospect of greatness which would finally rouse his energies and fill his time. But she, who was close to the summit of her career, for whom art had no mysteries, fame no more surprises, what should she do? what should she do?

But if the woman is sometimes stronger than the artist, the artist never sits long on the dust heap. Already it was whispering that she would act better than ever, she would descend into deeper and more intricate recesses of human nature when pondering upon her heroines, give the world more complete revelations. Even new forces of expression must be hers. She had never felt so creative as at that moment when she stopped short in her tigerish pacing and laughed aloud at the power of art to make itself heard at such a crisis in the human heart. At that moment, had art possessed a corporeal body, it too might have been throttled.

But it went on whispering: "Cultivate this berserk mood. Do not forget it, do not permit the will to stifle it if it fires the brain again. Continue to love this man, the more hopelessly the better. What is mere human passion to art; what, indeed, but its necessary but inferior partner? It is the stimulant, the drink, the food, the fertilizer. Nurse this! Nurse this!"

And her ambition? Would it not spur that as well? She had been too luxuriously, too artistically content, in this beautiful city, waiting for the world to come to her, content to dream of triumphs in its greater capitals. She had needed a shock, an imperative need of change of scene, of conquest of Earth itself to mend her riven soul; she might have idled here until her high notes had turned from gold to brass.

Her long fingers still twitched and curved, her face was as fearful as that of some dark creature of the Middle Ages poisoning a husband or rival; but her clearing brain argued pro and con, rejected personal happiness in favour of her art, finally announced that she still would have rejected it had the choice been hers. Ordham might have wrought extraordinary changes in her, but of the two passions that controlled her, that for him was not the stronger.

When she realized this, she went over to the dining room and disposed of the cold supper awaiting her. She had little appetite, but she ate abundantly, nevertheless, even warming the bouillon over the spirit lamp, for she knew that nothing would so certainly drain the blood from her head. When she had finished she returned to the gallery, and lighting a cigarette, sat down to think connectedly.

That she had no impulse to go to London and exert her fascinations upon Ordham, bring him to his senses, proved to her, that however she might resent his desertion, regret his loss, love him, in short, her mind would never permit her to wreck his career or her own. She had no taste for love in an Italian villa, idle herself, with an idle man on her hands; she was a worker, an artist; such a life would bore her to extinction, wither those tender and beautiful shoots that had not been blasted by the rain of hot ashes in her mind to-night. What she really wanted was a return of the old conditions, their permanence; and this she had known all along she could not have, known that it was an episode, from every moment of which she had deliberately extracted the full flavour. Did Ordham love and seek her, there were no mortal conditions in which they could unite. Her past life, which would be unearthed to

the last detail did she seek to enter society as an equal; her present position, so public as to relegate a husband to the position of a superior lackey; that insatiable artistic nine-tenths of her nature, — all precluded marriage with any man that respected himself; any permanent tie, in fact. She had exulted for eight years in her aloneness, her aloofness; now was the time to decide that this condition must exist as long as she did. There was nothing for her but art, art, art. She uttered the word aloud in her round sonorous voice; she no longer had the least desire to throttle it. On the contrary it induced the profoundest sensation of gratitude she had ever known. Without it where should she be to-night? Where, indeed?

It occurred to her to wonder that after her life of the past eight years there was any of the original woman left. What a poor half-born thing was civilization, with its educations, its spiritual developments, its thousand magnets for the higher and highly specialized centres of the brain, when a really great woman could be overwhelmed by passion like those confidential agents of Nature that swarmed the earth. If she still was unconscious of any elemental ache for this man, the fact remained that she had acted for an hour or two to-night with the blind primitive fury of a jungle beast deprived of its mate. And — it might be — if she was to continue to love the inner hidden man alone, — that product of the centuries charged with the electrical fascination of an uncommon personality which had charmed her out of her happy solitude, — she must see as little of him as possible. It was on the cards, that once roused, his progress would be very rapid, his character would overtake his mind. Then, were they thrown together, the real danger would begin. No doubt, one thing that had protected her was that the visible man was too young. She should have felt embarrassed had they taken to love making. But twenty-five is not young for an Englishman, and she might find him very wide awake indeed a year hence.

She made up her mind to correspond with him intermittently for a time, then drop him out of her life. She should

miss him, ache for him, be forced to plod through all the pros and cons again and again, for it is long before the reiterative heart runs down; but her will had carried her through great crises before; she could always rely upon it. And there were worse things than memories to live upon, particularly if radiant enough to put out the ghastly flickers of others.

She should overlook no opportunity that would lead her to a broader stage, replete with distraction. There was talk of organizing a Wagner season in New York as a *pendant* to the regular season of Italian and French opera, for the fame of The Master, thanks to Theodore Thomas, Leopold Damrosch, and other enthusiasts, was steadily growing. She had met Walter Damrosch in Bayreuth; he had heard her sing many times, and no doubt would have approached her for this innovation had it not been for the ten years' contract she was known to have signed with the Hof-und-National-Theatre in Munich, and the King's personal objection that she should leave Munich for more than a few weeks at a time. If this coming season of German opera was successful, she should write to Damrosch and announce her willingness to break her contract if unable to obtain a leave of absence. It was probable that by that time the King would be wholly mad; in that case her enemies in the Hof would be her allies for once. The only shadow on this brilliant future was the possible confiscation of her villa did she summarily leave without permission. That would substitute one unhappiness for another, for she passionately loved the only home she had ever had, and believed that the acuteness of its later associations would mellow with time. Well, she had her friends, Princess Nachmeister among others. Let the future take care of itself. Meanwhile she should demand other rôles here: the revival of the great operas of Glück — *Alceste, Ifigénie en Tauride, Orfeo ed Euridice.* She would sing the great rôle of Dido in *The Trojan.* All would afford her fine dramatic opportunities and fill her time with work.

She went to her desk to write to Ordham. The temptation was strong to betray something of what she felt. He

deserved that! And a sentimental letter, that last indulgence, was a woman's right. But she did nothing of the sort, reflecting in time that a man is not open to sentiment from two sources at once, particularly when in the throes of his puppy love. She did not even address the man she knew so well, and whom Mabel Cutting did not know at all, for she felt quite positive that he was sound asleep. She wrote him a dignified friendly note, telling him that she had long been prepared for the news, and was sure that he had chosen wisely. She did not even insert a blunt sting here and there, for she knew him so well that she could write exactly what, in his present mood, he most would wish to receive from her. When it was finished, she found her first real consolation in visualizing it as an impenetrable bulwark about her pride. She thanked her stars that he had not come in person to tell her of his engagement, permitting her to divine his passion for the little fool. No doubt she would have beaten him, and he would have been too polite to beat her in return! Heaven! what a mess she would have made of it. She devoutly hoped she had buried Peggy Hill five fathoms deep at last.

XL

HAPPY POTTERS

To Ordham's astonishment Bridgminster proffered the castle for the honeymoon. This graceful wedding-present was communicated by Lady Bridgminster soon after her return to London, and Mabel clapped her hands when told of it by her lover.

"It has been the dream of my life to see the inside of that heavenly castle," she cried. "And now I am going to live there! I cannot believe it."

"We can stay quite a month, I should think." Ordham was smiling into her triumphant face and feeling inanely happy. "I have received private intimation that I can replace one of the secretaries in Rome — he cannot stand the climate — and put in my time at the Foreign Office later. No doubt I can get out of that altogether, especially as I have already served a year abroad. But I cannot express my delight at spending a month in that old place as if it really were my own — and with you! with you!"

Mabel did not give her usual ready response to his rare ebullitions. The more deeply he descended into the depths of sentimentality induced by this wondrous creature and his general good fortune, the more shy he became, and Mabel, who had her share of the feminine intuitions, divining when he was more than commonly surcharged with silent adoration, teased him into expression of it. This time, however, he had delivered himself without assistance, and to his surprise she flushed and bit her lip.

"Oh, do let us stay through the autumn! It is the ambition of my life to have a succession of house parties at Ordham." Both eyes and voice pleaded. "Lady Bridgminster

says that your brother doesn't care how long we stay — mother had a note from her just before you came in. He never intends to live there again, and it is good for the house to keep it open."

"I cannot imagine what induced this fit of generosity in Bridg. It must have been made in an exuberance of delight in turning his back on Ordham, which he has always hated. It never fitted him, somehow —"

"But it will us! Say you will stay through the autumn. Please! Please!"

"But — but — I cannot have my way with the Foreign Office forever. My mother has great influence at present, but a political earthquake and I am high and dry, unless established first. I might be sent to Persia or South America! My fate would be all the worse for the liberties I had taken under the present government."

Mabel pouted and shook her head. "Don't talk politics to me. Everybody says that I was born to be a diplomat's wife, but thank heaven you are not in politics. Promise me that you will wait a little while — through the autumn."

Ordham looked at her in dismay. Once or twice before a sudden unaccountable lack of comprehension had given him fleeting pause, but some new manifestation of charm had banished any inclination to dwell upon it. Her transitions from a dignified girl of the world to a spoilt child, even a magpie, were sometimes bewildering, but he always hastened to remind himself that she was most beautiful, high-bred, desirable, exquisite. On these gifts he could count even should she disappoint other hopes. But he was by no means convinced that she would disappoint him in anything. He believed in her brain, although she showed a strange determination to give it rest, and he would not have had her less adorably feminine. But he would have welcomed a trifle more reasonableness, if only for its convenience. He answered gently:

"But Mabel!" He longed to say "darling," but starlight or moonlight was needful to work him up to that pitch; so he reiterated "Mabel" with increased tenderness

of accent. "You are far more interested in my career than in giving house parties at Ordham, are you not?"

To his infinite delight Mabel leaned forward and gave him an impulsive little kiss, exclaiming with her grown-up air: "Indeed I am. We will go to Rome at once, if you wish. That was just an old dream of mine. I have cherished it since I first set eyes on Ordham three years ago. But if you want to go right away —"

"Not for worlds. A man is entitled to a month when he marries, and I shall show up at the Foreign Office every day or so until the ceremony. The place will be kept for me. How splendid you are!"

And Mabel began at once to speculate upon the vacant palaces in Rome. How perfectly heavenly it would be to transform some musty old historical hole, reeking with tragedy, into a nest for two happy little birds. Mabel's phraseology was not always on a par with her lofty bearing and intellectual brow, but sometimes it was, and any man as much in love as Ordham would forget greater lapses still.

If Mrs. Cutting hastened the wedding that she might be present at the impending trial in New York, she was quite as determined to make it a distinguished function as if she had six months before her. And if few people were in London, nearly everybody was in England, and even Switzerland and the German baths were no great distance away. She received few regrets for the ceremony, which was to take place at St. George's on the tenth of October. She was very busy and very happy. She thought it a great pity that her lovely flower should marry at all, for she was one of those American women that regard matrimony with refined distaste, an evil to be submitted to for the sake of fashion, position, protection, and, no doubt, the race. Moreover, with the inevitable inconsistency of her sex, she would not have liked her lovely flower to turn sere and yellow, Nature's revenge on the mateless; but she sincerely hoped that after an heir had been presented to Ordham Castle, and, perchance, an understudy, Ordham's youthful ardour would have evaporated, and her flower

could settle down to the business of becoming a great lady, a woman of exceptional and undesecrated refinement; an easy achievement for one fastidiously reared by a fastidious mother. One reason for Mrs. Cutting's spontaneous selection of Ordham, and her adherence, in spite of several brilliant offers, to her original decision, was because of his apparent lack of animalism, and she grew more and more convinced that only the wild confusion of first love had roused him from his lethargy. He would soon revert, and this fact, coupled with his incomparable manners, would make him the ideal husband for that rare fine type of womanhood which only her own country at its topmost civilization could produce. Mrs. Cutting was justly proud of Mabel, for the adaptable American girl was not only capable of learning a great many lessons, from a polonaise by Chopin to the tactful manipulation of a cross but important old dowager, but London society had pronounced her the one flawless American in its midst, and its midst was at that time unusually distended with charming and popular Americans. That she had become one of the belles of the season independently of the stamp of that Prince for whose favour all ambitious women, Americans as well as English, sought, but from whom she had been religiously barricaded, was in itself a stamp of original distinction. Mrs. Cutting was pronounced equally irreproachable, if somewhat chilly and invariable, and she too might have purchased a coronet had she chosen; but she had no taste for the man she must take with it, and left her daughter to make the marriage which should place her unassailably in the greatest society of the world.

Ordham was somewhat amused at the renewed intimacy of his mother with Mrs. Cutting, but accepted her explanation that she was not the woman to waste her energies opposing the decrees of fate, that she was glad her son was happy, and that, after all, heiresses were heiresses. Besides, Rosamond's front teeth had rather got on her nerves, and she had unaccountably refused to have her hair touched up. Mabel Cutting was a beauty and would do the family credit, oh, no doubt of that. So she and

Mrs. Cutting might be seen any morning in Bond Street, shopping, and looking even more radiant than the young people, who saw little of one another in these busy last days.

That was a memorable wedding even in London. The church was a vast bower of maidenhair and orchids. (Nihilists in Russia gnashed their teeth when they read of it.) Ordham's connection alone filled half the pews; many of them had ordered new gowns for the occasion in their amazement at the millions flowing toward the family coffers, and that the magnet should be the most indolent and least susceptible of them all. If it had been Stanley, that splendid type of the orthodox, handsome, athletic, sanguine Englishman (he supported his brother at the altar), they could have understood it. But while they impatiently admitted that John was clever, they resented his radical departure from the type, and his complete indifference to their disapproval.

The day was warm and mellow. Not a cloud threatened ruin to the fine costumes with which the church rustled. Royalty honoured the occasion and occupied the front row of chairs. The bridal party, which had rehearsed in the American fashion, advanced up the aisle with precisely the right spacing, that their gowns might be duly appreciated. Lady Bridgminster wore a small bonnet and a tight gown of pale grey shining stuff which made her look not unlike a silver poplar. Mrs. Cutting wore heliotrope velvet and point lace that looked as if it might dissolve before the end of the ceremony. Princess Nachmeister, in a new brocade from Paris, resembled a wicked fairy in a beneficent mood. Of the six bridesmaids, two were Americans, two were French girls who had been Mabel's chosen friends in Paris, and two were Ordhams. Their gowns had been designed by Lady Bridgminster, and if Mrs. Cutting ran to orchids and ferns, her friend was faithful to the artistic movement to which she had so long lent the light of her ambitious countenance. These six graceful girls held up in front long clinging diaphanous gowns of gold tissue with one hand, and clasped to their bosoms immense sheaves of lilies with

the other. Their sleeves were greatly puffed, and on their heads were charming caps shaped like sunflowers. The old duchess, examining them through her lorgnette, and herself apparelled in black moiré and a mantle trimmed with bugles and fringe, remarked audibly that they looked like chorus girls; but they received only a passing attention, for Mabel was as lovely a bride as ever triumphed over a pitiless noonday sun. Beneath a robe composed entirely of rose point, and once in the wardrobe of some unfortunate princess, there was a shimmer as of pale green waters. Mabel had rebelled at looking like a Morris stained-glass window with Wilde improvements, but had agreed with Lady Bridgminster that there was no objection to resembling Undine if she could still be smart. As she advanced up the aisle on the arm of the American Minister, people stood up to look at her and whispered that did she remain in London a year or two longer she would reign as a "professional beauty" and dim the halos of the celebrated group. Ordham, slinking in from the vestry, terribly frightened but magnificently dignified, almost lost his breath when he saw her. Oh, there was no doubt that she had the grand air as well as beauty; and as she walked down the aisle at the conclusion of the ceremony on the arm of her princely young husband, her veil thrown back, her cheeks stained an entrancing pink, her head very high, London set the final seal of its approval upon her, adopted her as its very own, and hastened enraptured to the great house in Grosvenor Square, where all, not merely the family, had been bidden for breakfast.

What a pity that he should take her out of England! Why the diplomatic service — which might take them to unheard-of places? London was for the beautiful, the fortunate. And London was the apex of Earth. The Continent was all very well for baths, and gowns, and scenery, for music and old masters, or alas! economy. London being the Mecca of the civilized world, why, in heaven's name, did any one voluntarily live out of it? And with millions —

If Ordham heard these comments once, he heard them a

dozen times, and was the more annoyed as he observed that Mabel was irrepressibly gratified. The chief of all the personages present, finding speech with her for the first time, went so far as to assure her that the crown of professional beautyship was hers to grasp, even hinted that she could count upon his distinguished support. She turned to Ordham with a little gurgle of sheer happiness; but when she saw the thunder-cloud on the brow of her lord, replied prettily that she was quite convinced Nature had not fitted her to fill so exacting a rôle, and that, much as she adored England, she was quite frantic for the excitement of diplomatic life. The personage bowed and withdrew.

But these were passing clouds. Ordham carried his bride off to the country house lent them for the first few days of the honeymoon and was quite the happiest man on earth.

XLI

THE PRINCESS PINCHES

As the carriage crossed the moor in the twilight, Ordham saw that not only was the vast front of the castle illuminated, but that the village at the base of the fell was also brilliant. He was not surprised that his humble friends should light their windows in honour of his bride; but when he was close enough to observe that the village was *en fête*, that there were three arches in the main street composed almost wholly of lanterns, and that a torch flared on the roof of every cottage, he began to feel disquiet, and gave no heed to Mabel's expressions of delight; and when a dozen lusty young men made a sudden rush out upon the moor, and, unharnessing the horses, dragged the carriage into the village as far as the green, where all the rest of the inhabitants were assembled, the children in white, with nosegays, he wished that he had not come; for this demonstration was not merely a compliment to himself, it was an insult to his brother.

The ancient stone village, built when "Ordham" was prefixed by "de," and the Normans were defiling the Saxon well, squat and black under the rude illuminations, was a sight picturesque enough to gratify the heart of the most exacting American bride; and Mabel, who had been admitted to the secret, bowed graciously and won the hearts of the villagers immediately. She wore a very light grey costume and a big grey hat covered with feathers, and looked, particularly in the surroundings, exactly like a fairy princess.

The carriage halted. For some moments the cheering was deafening. Then there was a sudden expectant hush,

and Ordham, who had been smiling into the faces of his old playmates, turned white and muttered to his radiant bride: "My God, they expect a speech!"

Mabel, who was not accustomed to strong language, looked shocked, but recovered herself instantly. "You must, darling," she whispered hurriedly. "They always do."

"They?—Oh, yes, the new lord when he comes home for the first time, or with his bride, but I am not—Bridg!—Great heaven, what a position!"

"But you must!" Mabel gave him a pinch, which so astonished him that he was on his feet before he knew it and thanking them as awkwardly as possible for their delightful kindness. Then he managed to articulate something of his pleasure in bringing his wife to the home of his childhood, and sat down amidst shouts of approval, knowing that no man had ever made a worse speech, but still able to congratulate himself that he had said nothing in poor taste, nor anything that his brother, who had consistently been ignored by the tenantry, could find offensive. He was still so much in love that, although the pinch had filled him with a sudden unaccountable anger, when they were alone in the dark avenue rising to the castle, he kissed Mabel and remarked that if he had been able to make a speech at all upon such a trying occasion, she might thank herself, not his inadequate intelligence.

"You will always do the right thing," replied Mabel, complacently, "only you do need a lot of stirring up,"—a remark that would have created considerable amusement among the Ordhams could they have overheard it.

The courtyard was illuminated not only by the windows but by torches and coloured lanterns. All the servants of the castle stood at the foot of the staircase, and on that imposing feature itself were contributions from Grosvenor Square in the Ordham livery. Ordham noticed with fleeting astonishment that the liveries of his brother's servants also were new. He went through this ordeal more gracefully, but was glad to find himself alone with Hines in his old suite. Mabel had been conducted to the adjoining

suite by Mrs. Felt, who remarked, possibly for Ordham's benefit, that it was most unusual kind of his lordship to allow those London decorators to do it over, and that they had done wonders in so short a time. But Ordham, who was hungry and agitated, did not follow his bride into the renovated suite, but calling after her that he would meet her in the octagonal drawing-room, sought solace in his bath and a cigarette.

Half an hour later he strolled over to the other side of the palace and through the splendid suites of rooms, now as brilliantly alight as when his mother had given her great political house parties, but looking, in their emptiness, dim and Italian and old, with their high, darkly frescoed ceilings, their panelled walls set with religious paintings, a few of which were originals, the rest admirable replicas of the Italian masters, their tapestries, and infrequent but superb pieces of old Italian furniture, carved and gilded, upholstered with Venetian brocades,—all so carefully chosen by William Morris. The mantels were carved with large terminal figures and coats of arms; the fireplace in the octagonal drawing-room was of stone upheld by male and female figures and carved above with grinning masques. The cabinets, chests, and chairs of this room were the most elaborately carved in the palace; and on the walls, between the carved dado and the painted frieze, was a tapestry of white velveteen printed with brown acanthus leaves and powdered as with gold dust, designed by Morris. The hangings seemed to shed forth the rich and beautiful colours of the Renaissance textile fabrics; and the silks, brocades, and embroideries of this immense but sumptuous room, the silken carpet with Persian design, might have been discovered by the great decorator marvellously preserved instead of almost as marvellously made in his looms. The furniture, light, delicate, graceful, and a mass of intricate carving, had really served the grandees of the Renaissance, who, mayhap, had no such appreciation of its wonders as moderns have to-day. Even tradition did not whisper of the original furnishing of Ordham, for Cromwell's men had left not a stick; but no doubt it was

early and extremely rude Gothic, not to be compared in either comfort, elegance, or appropriateness with this interior, as Italian as the palace, or "castle" itself. The paintings and silver alone had been buried in time, and so escaped the vandals; nor had they vented their righteous wrath upon the mantels and panellings of the royalist who was distinguishing himself abominably in the army of Charles Stuart.

It was all very beautiful, very romantic, and had it been his, Ordham would have been the proudest young bridegroom in England; but he still felt in a false position, was oppressed by a sense of unreality mingled with anger that he should be compelled to experience such emotions. Commonly he excluded Bridgminster from his mind, for his last interview with his brother was a memory he would have been glad to obliterate; but to-night, when he had been forced to play at "make-believe," he was filled with resentment once more, and in no mood to regret the news subtly conveyed to him that Bridg was "in a bad way." "How fine you do look, sir," one of the men in the village had said to him. "His lordship, now, was that grey when he left you might say he had death writ in his face, and he sat like an old man and never so much as looked at one of us when he drove through the village — to make room for you, sir!"

But he was young and in love, and turned expectantly toward the door at the end of the long suite through which his bride must enter. After all, why should he not be proud to bring this pampered American to his ancestral castle? And if it were not his now, it would be one of these days, so why waste emotions upon an interval possibly brief? He shrugged his shoulders and dismissed them.

There was an almost imperceptible rustling of distant skirts on marble floors, and Mabel floated down the long vista while he stood and gazed upon her in expectation of new raptures. But to his surprise he experienced a shock of disappointment. Mabel was enchantingly dressed as ever. Her white train followed her like a cloud, and her

slender neck was almost hidden under ropes of pearls; a little wreath of diamonds rested in the yellow fluff of her hair. But she looked unaccountably small, out of place, insignificant, in these dim, stately, historical rooms. The white and gold spaces of Grosvenor Square, light, French, extravagant, gay, not too large, and with ceilings artfully lowered, might have been designed to frame her ethereal loveliness, and the idea crossed Ordham's mind that perchance they had.

But no misgivings beset Mabel, and as her husband suddenly advanced to meet her, she cried out, "Isn't this too lovely, Jackie?" (This fond nickname was, so far, her only indiscretion in his adoring regard.) "I feel like an ancient Lady Ordham come to life; and as for this immense castle, or palace, or whatever you call it, — isn't it exactly like those old things in Italy? — I had to send for a footman to pilot me. I never was so happy in all my life."

"You should be," said Ordham, gallantly. "Your capacity for conferring happiness passes belief."

Dinner was announced, and to his surprise they were conducted to the banqueting hall instead of to the dining room.

"This is my first order," said Mabel, smiling playfully, as they entered the vast room, whose panels were set with bygone Ordhams, and whose ceiling, frescoed on wood, panelled and gilded, was in the most elaborate Italian style. Ordham was amused at his wife's childishness, but nothing averse, for the dining room might have revived hideous memories he chose to forget. In this superb hall there were no memories for him but of great dinners to the county, hunt breakfasts, house parties numbering many Englishmen already passed into history. Now it must always be associated with his first dinner, in the company of his bride, in this splendid castle of his race.

Mabel, who seemed excited to the point of exhilaration, chattered incessantly.

"Oh, Jackie! Jackie!" she cried, as the servants finally left the room, "how simply wonderful this castle must

be when it is full of guests. Your mother says she has had more than a hundred people here at once. If you *won't* stay here, we must return some fall and have a regular traditional house party — royalties and all the rest of it. It would be exactly like living in one of Scott's novels, and as the castle is Renaissance instead of Elizabethan, we could have a fancy dress ball and make believe we were in Italy."

"The Renaissance reached England before Elizabeth," replied Ordham, diplomatically. "It is too good of you to feel that you will not have tired of Italy before we can return here."

"Oh, I love Italy, although I have malaria in Rome, and there are so many beggars, and my governess made me look at so many pictures. I am sure I can't see what good those miles and miles of tramping through dark stuffy galleries full of madonnas and saints did me, for I only remember about three pictures in all Italy. I remember my headaches much better."

"If you had a guide-book mind, there would be no room in it for anything else." Ordham was very indulgent to this bride of nineteen short years who so often shot him a glance of sweet appeal, or prettily begged him not to be severe if he discovered that she did not know as much as he did. "How could a girl just out of school compete with quite the cleverest young man on earth?" He had already begun to wonder how he could have expected her to know anything, and still oftener how any woman could look such unutterable wisdom out of an apparently empty skull. That bony structure, which included a high intellectual brow, width between the eyes, and a fine decided nose, was merely the shell inherited from a long line of able Americans who had made history, political and financial. It was a perfect and a very roomy shell. He had also begun to ask himself how long it would take to furnish it, and if the process would be as interesting as he had fancied. But what mystified him more than all was that during those weeks of his courtship, conscious and unconscious, he should have believed her to be serious, studious, remote,

vastly above her sex and age in all respects. Of course, he reflected, he was in love all the time — no doubt — and blind from the moment her beauty and grace had dazzled him in that incomparable setting. He knew now that Mabel had not progressed in her literary drudgeries beyond Scott and Macaulay, and had by no means exhausted those prolific authors; indeed, she openly yearned for abridged editions.

But that she possessed the shrewdness and adaptability of her sex and race was indisputable. Her brain was active if empty, and he had observed that during the long hour of the wedding reception she had talked with ease and volubility to every one, while sacrificing nothing of her girlish dignity. That she possessed grace, tact, the social talent, and was brilliantly, if superficially, accomplished, went far toward reconciling the future diplomatist to her complete indifference to Balzac, Flaubert, Meredith, Maupassant, Ibsen, and Turgénev. He chided himself for his unreasonableness in having deliberately created an ideal, and expected a girl just out of the school-room to fulfil it. And they had been married only a week. At least, if she had chattered almost incessantly, she knew when to drop a subject before it drove him mad, and she had suggested almost every phase of femininity. She had embroidered a bit one rainy morning when they could not roam in the woods; she had ridden horseback with him, played tennis and croquet, and sketched him in twenty different attitudes. Of her accomplishments and variety there could be no doubt. Nor of her young fascination. As they rose at the end of the dinner, although he involuntarily noticed again that the room dwarfed her, he also reminded himself that her cheek was like the traditional rose leaf, her pink mouth and even little teeth were worthy of a sonnet, and that she was altogether exquisite and desirable.

XLII

HIS HOUSE OF CARDS

For three weeks they roamed about the beautiful gloomy old park with its formal gardens, its old-fashioned English rose garden and shrubberies, and its many groves and alleys. The Italian garden was their favourite setting for the love drama still in progress; and Ordham could imagine no more beautiful picture composed by woman and Nature than Mabel leaning on the moss-grown balustrade above the sunken garden, with the high rigid cypresses and the setting sun behind her, and her hand resting lightly on one of the urns. But if Mabel had the gift of making pictures of herself, she was as often absorbed in the pleasures offered by perfect country weather. They rode, drove, played tennis and croquet, received and returned calls and dinners, and even attended a meet. But one day the weather changed abruptly. They awoke to the sound of a steady hopeless downpour. This, to married lovers, bent only on being happy, was but an enchanting variation. They explored the castle, ransacked trunks in a garret, searched for hidden springs in panels and secret drawers of cabinets, and, with the aid of a lantern and conducted by Mrs. Felt, investigated underground rooms that may once have done duty as dungeons.

Finally, exhausted and chilled, they retreated to the library fire, where Ordham extended himself on the hearth-rug, and Mabel, again a picture in a red scarf over her white frock and thrown into high relief by LaLa, lay in a deep easy chair and discoursed of popping corn and roasting chestnuts. Suddenly she sat erect, struck by a brilliant idea.

"*I'll* cable mother to-morrow to bring over a lot of pop-

pers and boxes of corn. It will be such fun to teach people, and so original."

"I am afraid there are only tile stoves in Italy," murmured Ordham, sleepily.

"Oh! I had forgotten Italy! Dear, darling Jackie, do let us spend six months at Ordham. With all my dreams I had hardly the ghost of an idea of how fascinating, how perfectly heavenly, it would be to live here. And not only the castle — but England, this country life, everything! I can't go away!"

"But Mabel — not only am I due in Rome one week from to-day, but we cannot outstay our welcome. Bridg is not the most generous and hospitable of mortals. It is a miracle that he lent us the place at all, and if we stayed too long — What is the matter?"

Mabel was staring down at him with a face deeply flushed and the light of a terrified defiance in her eyes.

"What is it?" repeated Ordham, uneasily. "You are not ill?"

"Oh, no! Well — it would have to come out pretty soon, anyhow. Jackie, I have a terrible confession to make."

"Confession?"

"Yes — don't look as if you thought I was going to say I had been engaged before, or something. You will be surprised at first, but afterward you will be perfectly delighted. Oh, Jackie! I have leased Ordham for five years."

"What?" Ordham rose slowly to his feet. There was a red stain on his face; he looked as if he had been struck. "What? I don't understand."

"I have always wanted it so much! I couldn't resist when Lady Bridgminster said your brother was so anxious to break the entail — to make money out of the place. Of course I was not such a fool as to buy what will one day be ours, but it was my own idea to lease it, and I think it a very bright one. My, but he charged a price! Bobby was furious. But I don't care if you will only stay. What is money for? Don't look at me like that!"

"I am very much surprised."

Ordham walked slowly to the end of the room and back

again. Then he confronted his wife. "It was my right to be consulted," he said, with his elaborate gentle courtesy, which Mabel had yet to learn might cover a very fury of anger, cold resentment, or the instinct of self-protection on the alert.

"You would never have consented," she said ingenuously. "You would have said, 'What is the use?' You were so bent on going abroad."

"Of course."

"I am sure that when you have thought it over you will simply love the idea of this wonderful old castle being really your own instead of waiting and waiting and waiting for it. It is horrid, waiting for people to die, anyhow."

"Much as I should like to possess Ordham, I have no desire to live in England. I do not care for English life except at rare intervals. There is nothing of the English country gentleman in me, and I prefer the Continent. That was one of my reasons for entering the diplomatic service."

"How can anybody like those down-at-the-heel aristocracies and vulgar bourgeoisies with all the money when one can have England — the only real thing? Oh, Jackie dear, please, please stay!" She clasped her hands, and he noted afresh, sharply displeased with himself, how beautiful she was. "I know, I know we shall be much happier here. And I haven't half seen London, been really a part of its wonderful life."

"You are talking like a spoilt child, crying for a toy," he said pleasantly. "Do you realize that you are asking me to give up my career?"

"Do you really care as much about it as you think? If you had been the oldest son and inherited four years ago, should you have thought about it?"

He took another turn up and down the room. "Perhaps not," he said finally. "But I think a great deal about it at present."

"I don't believe you have ever known what you wanted. Somebody always — Lady Bridgminster says that she and your father chose your career, that you were always too

indolent to plan anything, take any initiative. Oh, I have heard her discuss you a thousand times. I am sure that if you settle down here, you will like it a million times better than that tiresome old Continent. You can run for Parliament if you want a career. Lady Bridgminster says that you have all sorts of abilities if you would only wake up, and politics are certainly in your blood."

A white light was rising in his brain. "I fancy that I am quite the most dronish man alive. More than once in my life I have had the sensation of being gently engineered up to or past some crisis — and too indolent — polite word! — even to attempt to formulate the impression." He paused a full minute as if he would repress the question that finally slipped from his tongue, "Was I engineered into this marriage?"

Mabel flushed again and her eyes expanded, but she clapped her hands with a fine assumption of gay defiance. "Should you really have thought of marrying me if the idea had not deliberately been put into your head?"

He gazed at her with heavy veiled eyes, which she misread, and which covered revolt and fury. "How interesting," he said softly. "Do tell me about it. It was your clever mother, of course."

"And yours! She frightened you and roused all your stubbornness by threatening you with that dreadful Rosamond Hayle — who was engaged all the time! Oh, it was too funny!" Mabel, carried away by her little sense of drama, and completely deceived by her husband's smiling face, ran on. "You can't find any fault with me, at least, for I was frightfully in love with you — I never thought of any one else from the moment we met in Munich. Lady Bridgminster, of course, wanted you to marry a fortune, and Momma was equally set on the match, as she is so hard to please, and you are as much her ideal as mine. Heavens! how they coached poor little me. My head nearly burst with the effort even to look intellectual. I had to play the scornful indifferent beauty lest your lordship wander off in search of more difficult game. And all the time I was simply dying to write you a little note and ask

you to meet me for a walk in Kensington Gardens and have it out. That last week I had to take to embroidery in order to keep my eyes down. If you could see those stitches! But Momma and Lady Bridgminster said that I must hold off a while longer, that if I dropped into your hand like a ripe plum, you would find some way of getting out of it; your mother says that the only time you really rouse yourself is when you want to get out of something you have let yourself in for, and then you display positive genius. I was frightened half to death. Oh, thank heaven, it is all over!"

She made a graceful leap and flung her arms about his neck. "You don't mind a bit, do you? It isn't as if I were a poor girl angling for a rich man; and I should have been as wild about you if your brother had a dozen children. Now you can always tell yourself that you didn't marry me for my horrid money, but really fell in love. That is much nicer. You are too funny. You might have fallen in love with me in the course of a year or two if left to yourself, but in such a short time — without pilots — oh, never! And now it has turned out so wonderfully for the best."

"I wonder." He disengaged himself and walked the length of the room again. He felt a fool in a world of liars.

Mabel tactfully returned to her chair and bided her time. She had a shrewd albeit a small brain, and suddenly guessed that he felt some natural resentment at having been piloted, even for his own happiness. She had wisely yielded to the impulse to confess what he must have discovered in time (she had no belief in her ability to keep any secret for long), and never could man be more complacent than during his honeymoon. What the silliest woman does not know instinctively up to a certain point is not worthy of record, and Mabel felt that she had every reason to be sure of herself. Not only was she beautiful and accomplished, but she had all the arrogance of new-world wealth. Reared in luxury, she would have found it difficult to recall an ungratified wish, save possibly for unlimited sweets, but nevertheless she had a very keen sense

of the value and power of money; and as she watched the nervous figure of her husband perambulating the upper end of the room and then glanced slowly about the immense apartment with its thousands of volumes, many of them priceless, the ceiling with its carved and pictured panels and gilded rosettes, its gallery supported on Corinthian pillars, carved in suave and flowing lines, and its stone mantel in three stories cut with the arms of the house, the upper panel set with a faded picture of the Ordham that fell at Towton in 1461, she concluded that no man in his senses would quarrel for long with a ruse that had given him while still in his first youth one of the greatest properties in England. Their income was something over four hundred thousand dollars a year, and Mrs. Cutting's was at their disposal. To spend such a sum on the Continent was practically impossible. A mere attaché could not outshine his chief in the splendour of his establishment; and as for continental society, Mabel had all that contempt for it peculiar to the ambitious American who knows nothing of the inner circles of the European aristocracies and whose Mecca is London. With what might be called the American dollar instinct she had aimed straight for the top. To an immediate title she was indifferent, for she knew that Bridgminster would not marry. With all the strength of her slender equipment — and youth is always strong — she loved Ordham. She would have spurned strawberry leaves for his sake; but live in England and be a great lady and a "beauty" she would. These were legitimate ambitions, quite compatible with love, and as she had brought so much to her husband, she was entitled to much in return. Indeed, he should be eager to give all the equivalent in his power for the fortune that had been placed at his independent disposal. Mabel would have settled her ultimate penny on him instead of the solitary million upon which both sides, without bringing the young people into the sordid discussion, had agreed; but she was too American not to feel that when a penniless young man, with no earning capacity whatever, marries a wealthy and generous girl, he should give her something besides love in return.

It was true that Ordham, supported by his mother, could give her as definite a place in London society as if his brother were already dead; but Mabel's position was already brilliant, no girl had ever received more flattering attentions, and she was too young to be affected by her mother's occasional lament that they did not, even under Lady Bridgminster's wing, "go everywhere," that there were peaks inaccessible to the Cutting millions and proud descent until some great permanent connection cleared the way as a matter of course. Nevertheless, that cool little brain, inherited from money-makers and money-conservers, reminded Mabel that her Jackie, in not yet being able to make her Countess of Bridgminster, was not giving value received; therefore should he live in England and permit her to derive every possible advantage from this marriage. Mabel's character was not built about a deeply embedded steel frame like Ordham's, but she was thoroughly spoilt, although so well brought up that she had never dared to snub or contradict her mother in the vulgar American style. One private little resource she had, however, which she had often brought to bear when her doting and unsuspecting parent would have spared her the fatigue of pleasures beyond her years: she could not only weep beautifully, but work herself up into a condition bordering upon hysteria; and she had invariably terrified her parent into submission when driven to this extreme, as well as her teachers and governesses, — every one, in fact, whose pleasant duty it was to keep the little feet of the amiable heiress upon the strait and narrow way that leads to perfect success.

Mabel arranged herself gracefully in her chair and spread out her voluminous white skirts as a bed for LaLa, complacently sure of her victory in this engagement with her equally spoilt young husband. In the course of a few moments he walked down the room and stood before her.

"You are so wonderfully clever," he said, with his charming smile. "It only makes me the more confident *that* you were born to be the wife of a diplomatist. But I

cannot loaf here on your money. You are not the first American I have known, and I have absorbed a few ideas that might not have bothered me a year or two ago. I am now all the more disposed to make a career for myself that I may in a measure balance this great fortune of yours. Bridg is not yet forty. We are a long-lived race. It may be twenty, thirty, years before I can offer you any other equivalence. I hate politics. I have passed my examinations by a miracle. The diplomatic path is almost as miraculously smoothed for me by family influence. We have been for generations what is known as one of the diplomatic families; and just now one of my mother's cousins is prime minister and another secretary for the colonies. A year hence and they may be in opposition. I saw in this morning's *Times* that one of my own cousins has been appointed ambassador to St. Petersburg. He will do anything for my mother. We can go there if you dislike the idea of Rome. My promotion should be very rapid. When you are the wife of an ambassador you will find it vastly more entertaining than giving tiresome house parties in England."

"But even if your promotion were rapid, we'd be frightfully old before you became ambassador — forty-five you'd be at the very least. Lady Bridgminster — I've heard all that discussed —" She had looked at him steadily during his long speech, at first with smiling incredulity, then with growing apprehension. For the first time she took note of the long line of his jaw, of the coldness of which those large ingenuous blue eyes were capable. Her brain worked rapidly. She recalled Lady Bridgminster's amused comments upon the driving of "Johnny" in any direction by employing the right sort of opposition, that distinguished dame's tactical use of Rosamond Hayle. But something deep down within her trembled a little — hinting of impotence, so new a sensation that she barely recognized it, although she fully understood that her Jackie had made up his mind. Therefore, postponing the higher tactics, she did what all sensible women mated to obstinate men ever do, she burst into tears.

But Ordham had seen women cry easily before, and was not as moved as a husband of four short weeks should be while his lovely bride wept and sobbed over the arm of her chair. He was ice-cold with anger; Mabel's betrayal of the secret that his mother also was indifferent to his career was the final indignity; and he reflected cynically that the sooner a man discovered just how much a woman's tears were worth the better.

But he was always courteous. He was also quite aware that underneath his wrath he was as much in love as ever. He was young and this exquisite creature was his; he appreciated the force of that subtle argument of hers, that if she had lent herself to the plot it had been through love alone. It would be some time before he forgot that she was an accomplished liar, and that he had been made a fool of by three clever women; but there was no particular reason why either he or his wife should be miserable when they still had much to make them happy. But they should be happy in his way, not hers. So he bent down and patted her head, somewhat awkwardly, for he felt anything but affectionate, and said very kindly:

"Don't cry, Mabel. We will think no more about it."

"No more about what?" sobbed Mabel. "Do you mean that you will go abroad?"

"Of course."

"That means that you hate me."

"How can you say such a thing?"

"You do! You do! If you didn't, you wouldn't refuse the first thing I ever asked you."

"But the first thing happens to affect my whole future."

"You don't consider that it affects mine, too!" with sobs of increasing vehemence. "I shall be utterly miserable playing third fiddle to a lot of horrid old official women that think more of themselves than the Queen of England, of never being able to get away from the everlasting cackling of foreign languages, and of always being ill, for I — I — am never well abroad —"

"Oh? I first met you in Munich, and I never saw even an English girl with so beautiful a bloom."

"But I'm never well unless I'm happy!" articulated the desperate Mabel. "And I hate, hate, hate the Continent. I adore England. I must, must live my dreams. I have dreamed of this for years. A dozen men could have given me castles, but I wanted you, and you ought to give me that much in return."

"If you love me so much, it seems odd to me that you do not place my future before those old fairy tales of your childhood," said the logical male to his mate.

"I can't, oh, I can't!" She raised her face to his. There was a pause. Ordham stared at her, fascinated, almost forgetting his anger. He had never seen such big tears. One by one the immense crystal drops welled from those dark pools and slipped down her flushed cheeks. He felt that a woman was fortunate indeed to possess such a gift as those beautiful iridescent spheres, which, no doubt, she could command at will — irresistibly his thoughts flew to the soap bubbles of his boyhood — mechanically he began to count them — Mabel suddenly gave a strangled cry of defeat and rage, sprang to her feet, and fled from the room.

For two hours he sat by the fire and smoked, depressed and apprehensive, but determined. Then he went upstairs and knocked at his wife's door. It was locked, but in a few moments the maid opened it gently and announced that Mrs. Ordham, after crying for the past two hours without pause, had fallen asleep.

On the following morning Hines informed him that mademoiselle — the maid — was quite worried: her mistress had cried all night, and was now in such an hysterical condition that she thought of sending for the doctor. Once more the husband craved admittance and was denied. He went for a ride, the weather being fine again. Upon his return he was told that the doctor was with his wife. In real alarm, he posted himself beside Mabel's door, and in a few moments the little old man who had ushered him into the world came out.

"No — no — nothing serious, of course not. That is to say — you understand. She became alarmingly wrought

up at the prospect of leaving England — you know what fancies — "

Ordham felt as if his very marrow had turned cold. "Not yet — surely not yet — " he stammered.

The doctor nodded. He rubbed his hands, feeling important and a trifle excited. "Indulge her for the present. You have the rest of your life for that career of lies they call diplomacy. Indulge this dear child, or I won't answer for the consequences — her maid tells me that even when crossed in ordinary circumstances her health is menaced — the poor dear spoilt child of fortune! And so beautiful! I have pledged her my professional word to persuade you to remain in England for a year, at least. And what more natural, more beautiful, indeed, than this wish of hers that your first child should be born at Ordham? Think, too, of foreign doctors! So, go in, dear boy, and promise her to sit tight. Do, and she'll be as fit as a fiddle to-morrow."

Ordham, baffled and helpless, turned on his heel. "You can tell her that I will remain in England — of course," he said. "I will see her in an hour or two. Just now I wish to go for a walk."

XLIII

THE WOMAN'S INNINGS

ORDHAM walked far out on the moor, then returned, not to the house, but to stroll up and down between the avenue of plane trees that connected it with the Italian garden. He finally threw himself down on a seat in his favourite spot. Above the glassy lake was a broken grey balustrade covered with mould and barely outlined against the stiff old cypresses beyond. In a dark grove on his right were marble seats, several noseless fauns and nymphs, the whole scene so reminiscent of Italy that his mind, always liable to peculiar deflections, experienced once more a sense of infidelity to Margarethe Styr: so often they had planned together that month in Italy which he had been the one to suggest, and this had been a favourite spot for making love to his bride.

He was too indolent to cherish anger for any great length of time, but resentment lingered, and since his talk with the doctor not only had it increased, but he felt that old sense of humiliation in not rising to an occasion. He had a hazy idea that young husbands always flew enraptured to worship their brides anew when informed that their ego had taken a fresh lease; but he felt anything but enraptured. Not only was he very much embarrassed, but, while shrinking from arranging the idea in words, he felt that Mabel, in her determination to press on to victory at any cost in this their first battle, had been indelicate in taking advantage of what could be little more than inference on the part of the doctor aided by her own canny suggestions. Wild horses would not have dragged such *an admission from him* until the last possible moment.

How could she have talked it over with Cresswell — and, no doubt, with her maid? The ideal Mabel whom he had distractedly worshipped for one interminable fortnight had trembled more than once on her pedestal during the intimacy of the honeymoon, but it took this final conscious offence to sweep her off and leave her standing at the base, still beautiful, young, and fascinating, but for evermore bereft of illusion.

He resented, too, the sudden loss of that sense of pagan youth that he had enjoyed from the moment he had met Mabel in London, and which had been crushed but by no means extinguished during the fortnight of despair. He recalled the day in the Maximilianstrasse when he had ungratefully carped at fate for the undue allowance of women of the world that had fallen to his share. He had come into his inheritance soon after, and now he felt suddenly dispossessed. He had not the faintest desire to become a father; the very idea made him hot all over, then cold. Ten years hence would have been time enough; for the matter of that, nothing short of a plague could exterminate his family.

It is probable that to-day he had for the first time something more than a glimpse of the depth and vigour of his egoism, which, heretofore, polite even to himself, he had ignored. At all events, he realized that unconsciously he had for years been planning an existence into which the commonplace and material should as little obtrude as was possible on this mortal plane; he became aware that one of Mabel's salient attractions had been her ability to help him to achieve this ideal existence with as little trouble to himself as possible. Now that his career was peremptorily postponed, he wanted it more than ever, and not for the services he might be able to render to his country — he admitted this brutally — but that he might live in the congenial atmosphere of Continental and diplomatic life, the while he dwelt in a romantic and splendid old palace with his lovely bride. He wanted to buy beautiful things every day in the treasure-house of Europe. His searching analytical mind craved the constant refreshment of new peo-

ples, with their strange customs, their hidden traits, their thousand differentiations from the people of his own land. He wanted the bright suns of Europe, the wonderful nights, the light careless brilliancy of Continental life, the abundant music, the un-British drama from which every taint of puritanism and philistinism had been banished long since. While his remarkable poise, not the least of his gifts, had preserved the health of his mind notwithstanding his insatiable curiosity, still was it a mind that could only feel quite alive when feeding upon the unusual, stimulated with a variety not to be found rooted in his own orthodox soil; with all, indeed, that was covered from common uncomprehending eyes. To remain in England for a year on end as a prospective parent and an idle country gentleman, while he hated increasingly his sporting neighbours with their wolfish appetites, and was pressed down into the very depths of gloom by leaden skies and drizzling mists — he was still young and irresponsible enough to think of bolting.

But in a little while he faced another side of his problem. He was married to a girl whose pampered existence had given her a fairly good substitute for a strong will. It was patent that when she discovered his was the stronger she would resort to weapons — those enormous tears, for instance, — which he as a man could not emulate. He wished that he had something to fling viciously into the lake, but in that well-kept garden there were neither rocks nor fallen branches. The pebbles of the path were much too small. Then he laughed aloud as he realized that in one small tract of his brain he was as much of a child as his wife. Then he ground his teeth —

He stirred uneasily, turned his head. Mabel was standing there in the grove. Her hair looked like an offering from the sun to the soft gloom of ilex and cypress. Surrounded by those ancient trees, those battered old fauns and nymphs, she looked like the blessed damozel. If she was as white as her frock, her eyes were shining. She had never been more beautiful.

Ordham caught his breath. He had a confused sense

that the world had turned over and in the act burst open a shell from which the ideal Mabel, that Mabel whom he had once seen in a sort of magic reflection, had really emerged. She stood quite still, gazing at him with soft appealing eyes, yet holding herself with dignity, and seeming taller than when under the lofty ceilings of the castle. Once more she looked the creature of pure romance, the fairy princess. His pulses shook. In an instant he was the adoring bridegroom, youth revelling in the joy of having found its mate.

Mabel permitted him to cover the distance, and when he had taken her in his arms and kissed her many times, with a certain imperious softness that never became violent, she asked him to sit down, and nestled against him in a fashion that made him feel very big and strong. Then she murmured apologies for "going to pieces." "She had hidden herself to cry it out, first because she was unhappy and ashamed, and then because she could not control herself. Brigitte had sent for that dear old doctor, who had made her well at once." By common consent the delicate subject was ignored, and they prattled like happy children themselves.

On the following day she was pink and white once more, in the best of health and spirits. It was evident that she was to be spared the minor and more humiliating commonplaces of maternity. A week later Lady Bridgminster, who had joined them, was sending out invitations for a monster house party, while the bridegroom ordered the guns cleaned, the discharged beaters replaced, the stables replenished, and felt as if he were hypnotized.

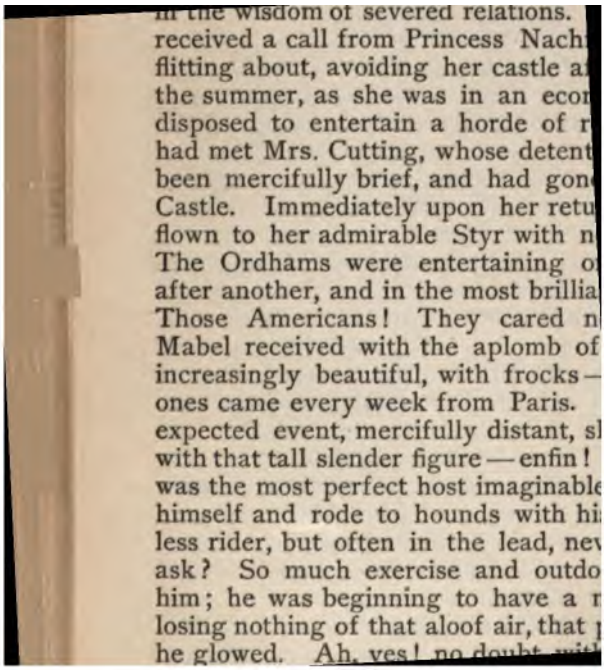
XLIV

STARS AND DUST

MUNICH was sheathed in ice. The bare trees of the Englischergarten, the little parks set into the city like so many jewels, the long avenue of the Leopoldstrasse, the thousand gardens, glittered with the prismatic radiance of the diamond, while the hard snow was underfoot, and the sky was like a vast blue and white flag of the House of Wittelsbach. The lake was frozen, and gay with skating parties. The Isar alone flowed too swiftly to be caught in the ice grasp. It was intensely cold, clear, brilliant, tonic. Margarethe opened the window of her tower and stood looking out at the arctic splendours winter had given to the park beyond the light green belt of water. Once more she felt something of the exaltation of spirit that in the old days she had been able almost to summon at will, and that had never tarried before such inspiration as this.

But she moved away in a moment with an impatient sigh and returned to the warm comfort of the gallery. It was now four months since she had seen Ordham, and she was still unable to break the mental habit of discussing all things interesting with him, invoking him to share her pleasure. She had but just now called his attention to the contrast of the beryl green of the river with the crystal groves beyond. Yesterday she had caught herself discussing *A Rebours* with him. Was it not time to banish this senseless habit?

It was, of course, the effect of living alone, and some time since she had made up her mind to go constantly into society upon its return, become a persistent seeker after the lighter distractions of the world. She sighed again as she thought of that ideal life she had led in this villa by the


in the wisdom of severed relations.
received a call from Princess Nach
flitting about, avoiding her castle a
the summer, as she was in an eco
disposed to entertain a horde of r
had met Mrs. Cutting, whose detent
been mercifully brief, and had gon
Castle. Immediately upon her retu
flown to her admirable Styr with n
The Ordhams were entertaining o
after another, and in the most brillia
Those Americans! They cared n
Mabel received with the aplomb of
increasingly beautiful, with frocks—
ones came every week from Paris.
expected event, mercifully distant, s
with that tall slender figure—enfin!
was the most perfect host imaginable
himself and rode to hounds with hi
less rider, but often in the lead, nev
ask? So much exercise and outdo
him; he was beginning to have a r
losing nothing of that aloof air, that
he glowed. Ah, yes! no doubt

was evident that he was well content. And why not? Gott! but that was a life. Forty million marks and as much again when dear Adela was gathered to her American ancestors. Gott! One of the greatest places in England virtually his own, a broken-down elder brother, and a lovely wife!

"I forgot that I had been so ambitious for him," continued the old dame, contritely. "I said: 'But this is enough. Why fly in the face of providence by asking all things? And if dear Mabel is so opposed to life on our Continent — what substitute, indeed, could we offer her, since she does not mind the climate of this island?' And he said, in his old manner: 'Of course. Why indeed? She is so happy that I am almost in love with England myself. It is all very wonderful.' Then when I was gone from that enchanted scene, I reproached myself. Shall he bury those great abilities in matrimony, in society, in that country which is always making great men but very properly sending them elsewhere? Is he not made to manipulate the destinies of Europe? I should have remonstrated instead of weakly yielding, almost participating in his happiness, the charming creature! It was such a delight to hear him jest and run on in his old fashion, to see him happy as the young should be happy. We must trust to time. He will wake up. It may be two years, three. But he was born to be a diplomatist and a great one, and that is not for nothing. Mabel may rule now, he may be philosophically happy, but —"

Judiciously interrogated, the keen old observer admitted that Mabel was selfish, spoilt, "American." She loved Ordham. But yes! Was it not his lot to be loved? Too much, no doubt. He had the gift, the genius of charm, and when a young thing was married to him — enfin! Had she, Olivia Nachmeister, been fifty years younger, she should have married and worshipped him herself. But Mabel had no real sensuousness in her nature, none of those strong emotions that make the woman the willing subject of a resolute man. She loved, yes; but with youth, selfishness, vanity, romantic sentiment, the instinct of the

race. That little brain would be cool and calculating in its fondest moments. He might win if ever it came to a great battle of two wills, crush that poor little butterfly, who fancied herself a personage of vast importance; but he never would manage her. But never! That was her part, and whether he recognized that fact, and was resigned, other causes keeping him in England, or whether he was merely enthralled, she could not say. But he had a jaw. Ma foi, but a jaw! And Mabel had been indulged like a — well, an American princess ("Who more disciplined than ours?"), from the moment she screeched in her cradle. "Some day — well, what matter? Do not all have their troubles? They are fortunate, those two, but they are not immortals. Think of our beloved King, and of Rudolph von Hapsburg. But the future Bridgminster has one talent denied these poor princes, what you call 'landing on his feet.' Through no management of his, perhaps, but destiny — women? — Yes, shall not we always arrange that he alights in the safe spot, dry, sound, whole, even if he has whirled through the air in the heart of what you call a cyclone? What happens to the women? Ah, many die in this world that a few may live, dear Gräfin." It was a mere matter of destiny — of the survival of the strongest — of charm, perhaps? She was a student of effects, not of causes. It was enough to know the surface of this terrible world; but dig up the roots and put them under the microscope? Not she! That was for clever people like Die Styr and their dear *jüngling*.

To do Excellenz justice, she had not come altogether to torment Styr with this picture of Ordham's felicity, for she was still convinced that there had been but a pleasant summer friendship between the two, whose only undercurrent was the subtle influence exercised upon Ordham in behalf of his examinations. To no other woman would she have given the benefit of the doubt for a moment, but not only had Styr let the young man go, permitted him to marry, but she looked quite the same as ever. She was an artist, nothing more. They came to that! What the *Nachmeister* had forgotten, possibly because the fact was

so glaring that it blinded her, was that Styr was a great actress. And she was something more, a woman of magnificent pride, of iron strength of will. Not a tear had she shed over the loss of Ordham, not a moment's sleep had she lost since that night when she had very nearly taken all Munich into her confidence. She could summon sleep, banish thought, the moment her head touched the pillow. She had no mind to furnish gossip for Nachmeister, still less to ruin her own life. If she chose to spend her idler hours in his imagined society, why not? That was compensation of a sort and did no harm.

She had persistently refused to sing *Isolde* again, for not only was she aware that Munich would demand a repetition of her last performance, an impossible feat even for her, but, strong as she was, she shrank from too vivid a reminder of that awful night. She had weathered a storm of feeling that would have prostrated a weaker or a less seasoned woman; but avaunt its memory, nevertheless!

The worst was over, yes, but not for a moment did she cease to miss him, to regret, to long unreasonably for his return. Her mind argued that an episode of that sort when closed was closed forever, but her heart ached. True, she had had the perfect experience she deliberately planned, she possessed a beautiful memory; but she found this cold comfort, now that she no longer pretended to deny that she loved him, that her imagination had woven itself all over that Ordham so unknown to others, until he was almost visibly hers.

This morning she asked herself squarely what she intended to do, admitting as squarely that from the very first she had had no real intention of remaining quiescent and forgotten. She could meet him within a week if she chose, for a prima donna can always develop a throat and demand a rest. But she was quite positive that the time had not yet come for their second meeting. She knew that he would tire of his Mabel, hate her, beyond doubt, and before long; but she did not care to see him until then. Ordham complacently in love with a pretty doll might sicken her; she was resigned never to find again the

young man she had known, but she wanted him in his next evolution, not this! not this!

She had remained becalmed, unanalytical, until yesterday, because nothing had occurred to rouse her from the half melancholy half pleasurable state of mind into which she had drifted. But Princess Nachmeister's gossip had filled her with rage and bitterness. The sleeping devil she so seldom permitted to assert itself stirred, yawned, awakened. The little fool had lived in her paradise long enough. She comprehended the intentions of Mabel Ordham and her mother, for Excellenz had prattled for quite an hour. They purposed to turn this brilliant gifted but incomparably lazy young man into the mere husband of a rich wife, of a professional beauty, manipulating and drugging him until the springs that carry ambition over discouragement and opposition had sagged, broken, and he would sink down into his good fortune, entertaining the great of the land at his castle, proud of the enormous social importance to which he had attained in his youth; taking the waters at Carlsbad, growing stouter every year; wintering on the Riviera; everywhere following his wife at a respectful distance while her court crowded at her heels; taking out his increasing brood for an occasional romp in the park —

She sprang to her feet with a hoarse cry of rage and a face that would have made Excellenz cross and excoriate herself. But before she reached her desk that other self so assiduously cultivated these last nine years cried out peremptorily. True, she did take a deep and legitimate interest in this young man whose future was threatened, but that was not the impulse which drove her to open a campaign that must shatter his domestic life. No woman, particularly no woman constantly exercising an art, occupies herself for long with the future of any man that has not vitally interested her. Friendship between the sexes is casual, a mere matter of time and habit, never demonstrating itself during long absences unless love skulks at the foundations. Had Ordham interested her no more vitally than he had interested so many others dur-

ing his memorable sojourn in Munich his future could have taken care of itself. But not only was he her chief work, whom she would not renounce unfinished, but she wanted him to be conscious that his soul, his ego, was hers. The passions of the body, what were they to the passions of the heart? There were remedies for the impulses that man shared in common with the beasts, but none short of death for that imperious demand of the soul for its mate. It was the one thing that made her give some credence to religious belief, this insistent desire of the hidden ego for one other ego out of the billions of egos on Earth alone. Possibly these two had sought one another since the birth of Time; perhaps they had been united and severed, united and severed; paying, no doubt, for sins and crimes for which no other adequate punishment could be devised even by a resourceful God. If she had committed crimes in another existence instead of hideous sins as in this, it was possible that her punishment was that brief tormenting glimpse of her other part, possible also that she should be just, and accept the natural sequence as final.

But his secret, invisible life?

She made a last effort to be "fine," always a pitiful effort in people foredoomed by the very strength of their wills and passions, the anarchistic tendencies of their strong brains, to failure. Let him go! When he was older! Time might awaken him, ambition call, with no assistance from her. Let him be happy as long as he could; untroubled. Let that poor child, whose worst offence, after all, was her love for this charming young man — bah! Not for nothing was she the greatest of Isoldes. She went straight to her desk.

XLV

EUROPE'S BOUQUET

A GROUP of æsthetes — the women in the livery of Burne-Jones, the men in the satin small-clothes, velvet coat, and silk stockings affected by Wilde — stood before the great stone mantel in the octagonal drawing-room of Ordham, permitting the brilliant company to gaze upon them. The only celebrities present were the reigning professional beauty, that famous young politician who resembled an intellectual pug, and the great poet who looked like the reincarnation of Paris and Helen of Troy. The rest of the distinguished company scattered throughout the endless suites of state reception rooms were drawn from nearly every old family in the kingdom, and there were royalties, domestic and foreign. Mrs. Cutting and Lady Bridgminster had assembled these unrivalled house parties one after another, the former not only with a proud satisfaction, but with the complacent sense of fulfilling a patriotic duty, the latter with a keen relish in handling the income of millions as were it her very own.

Mabel, spared every detail, had only to dress herself exquisitely, sit at the head of the table in the dining room, or in a high abbot's chair, carved and gilded, in one of the salons, look radiant, and chatter. She did all to perfection.

But these three notable figures, two with inexhaustible wardrobes from Paris, the other looking alternately like a Burne-Jones or a Rossetti, to say nothing of the magnificent rooms, now made richer and more inviting by a thousand subtle touches, were but a background for the young host. Never for a moment had Ordham been

reminded that this lavish display, this recrudescence of the glory of his house, this skilful gathering of the most difficult people in England, had been accomplished with his wife's money, not with his own delayed inheritance. He had heard of the unhappy fate of American husbands, but had quite forgotten that beyond the seas the world was woman's. In this splendid company he was the legitimate host, the chief figure; several of the men that ruled the destinies of Britain might have had long and meaning conferences with "Lady Pat," so subtly did they flatter and court him.

The natural modesty of his disposition was deftly overlaid by the as natural assurance of his birth and bringing up, for not only was he consulted, flattered, his judgment challenged that it might inevitably pronounce the last word, by these three women, until he felt older and more important every day, but his position as host threw him into intimate association with many of the most eminent men and women in England. And besides their friendship for Lady Pat, they were much impressed with the Aladdin-like, yet never vulgar, lavishness of these entertainments, and really found Ordham as charming and clever as people always did when he was on his good behaviour.

Nor did Ordham trouble himself to remember that all was not his. The first party was not over before he had slipped insensibly into the rôle of hereditary lord of the manor, forgotten the existence of his elder brother, or remembered him only to feel a passing relief that he need no longer wish him dead and experience that hateful demoralizing shame. Some of the guests were dull, notably the most important, but there were others whose conversation he found delightful; and the perpetual atmosphere of gayety, brilliancy, life, which now pervaded the castle, diverted his mind from the Continent. For not even in the old days, when his father had been a cabinet minister, had Ordham Castle known anything like this. The family rent-roll was large, but not inexhaustible. It was all very romantic, enchanting, and his self-love was mightily tickled. Had he come into his titles and estates upon

the death of his father, he would have been less impressed no doubt; but after a long interval of petty financial annoyances, this sudden good fortune filled him with an abiding if complacent sense of enjoyment. One moment of humiliation and the work would have been undone. But if Mrs. Cutting and Mabel had not discovered the pride and sensitiveness in that complicated nature, there was always her ladyship to advise; and day by day the young man who had accomplished nothing, who had not even been chosen by destiny to succeed his father, was lifted higher and higher into that rarefied atmosphere where the nectar of flattery was ever at his lips, in goblets of gold fashioned to delight the artist within him. Mabel had even renounced the desire to remain uninterruptedly at Ordham for a year; they were to go to London as soon as she was no longer equal to house parties; her husband should continue to be amused in that capital he did not pretend to despise.

As for the chef at the castle, he had no rival in New York, and received a higher salary than the American Minister. The wages of the old servants were increased, and although they disapproved of alien blood, they were well content to see their idol in his rightful position. Nevertheless, they longed for the great day when this ancient domain should really be his, not rented with American dollars. They corresponded with a servant in the small household of the secluded Bridgminster and were not as impatient as they might otherwise have been. American wives were well enough, particularly when high-bred and inoffensive, but they wanted to see the Ordham coffers carried back to the castle.

But Ordham cast not a thought to the ancestral coffers, assisted perhaps by those water-tight compartments with which nature had endowed him, and more particularly when he strolled among his guests after dinner, discharging his duties as host with the zest of youth under his languid manner. It is true that the small and repeated doses of Americanism administered by Margarethe Styr lingered in his mental system, but they were kept sternly under. If once or twice they whispered that he was living on his wife's

fortune, he sharply reminded them that neither Mrs. Cutting nor Mabel could have assembled parties like this, and that, apparently, was all they lived for. Lady Bridgminster, although hospitable to celebrities and artists, when they knew how to behave themselves, was notoriously one of the most exclusive hostesses in the kingdom. "New people" had seldom found a permanent place on her visiting list, never unless they were foreigners. Mrs. Cutting, with her unerring social instinct, had recognized this fact during her first season in London, but although she had the good fortune to take her ladyship's fancy, she would have been dropped in time had she proved of no material benefit. Nor could Lady Bridgminster have induced certain personages to come to an American woman's house parties until this marriage of the daughter had placed her in a new and infinitely more important position. Of all this Ordham as a man of the world was fully conscious, but what he did not suspect was that his mother also was determined to keep him in England. Why the diplomatic career, now that he possessed the riches to which that was to have been but the stepping-stone? Nor would he have the same opportunities for magnificence on the Continent, certainly not for being of service to her distinguished self. He was kind and generous, but he had a habit of forgetting people when out of their range. And although he had immediately settled an income on herself, as well as on two of his brothers, that would be a small compensation indeed for the free hand she now enjoyed.

Many young people were invited to Ordham. If he could not sit beside them at table, he could play tennis and croquet with them, loiter about the park and in the woods with girls almost as pretty as his wife, sit with them in the picturesque ruin of the original castle, occupied by generations of Ordhams before the tidal wave of the Renaissance reached England. There was also music, private theatricals, tableaux, and not too much dancing, which he detested. There were other young men, not all of them mad on the subject of sport, and always some brilliant figure from the artistic world like Wilde, then the idol of all the clever

young brains in the empire. Altogether, he thought, as he strolled through the great rooms of his castle to-night, he felt that life was quite enchanting and only hoped that he would not grow fat.

He paused beside Mabel, who immediately turned her shoulder upon her little court and looked up at him with a brilliant smile. She was too well-bred to display her adoration in public, but at least she might pretend that he was an illustrious guest. She wore her favourite shimmering green, with lilies in her girdle. Her golden hair shone like nebulæ against a dull piece of green tapestry, thrown over the back of a tall chair by an unerring æsthete.

"Are you bored, Jackie darling?" she whispered.

"Of course not. How can you ask such a thing? No one is bored. It is quite astonishing how you and the respective maters manage. Even the men that have been out all day seem to have got hold of the right women and look almost awake."

"Lady Pat says that English women are much more amusing than they used to be, and I adore them, myself. How wonderful it all is, and the most, most, most wonderful is that I have a husband, although I am only nineteen, whom all these distinguished and worldly people admire."

This speech struck him as obscurely pathetic, consequently its flattery missed the mark. He looked down upon her kindly. "Don't overdo it," he whispered. "I must go now and talk to that old lady with her wig on one side. Fortunately she is rather amusing, or I might resent being her host."

"Do you mean the duchess — your grandmother?" asked Mabel, wonderingly. Why were English people so odd sometimes?

"I believe she is. I only remembered for the moment that she often makes me laugh."

Mabel stood watching him as he bent with his formal manner and charming smile over the old lady of whom she stood in some awe, for there was no more caustic tongue in England than the old duchess's, and she lost no opportunity of informing the Cuttings that they were the

rst Americans she had ever met. But it was her hus-
and's careless words that held Mabel's puzzled attention.
he understood her own departures from the truth, because
ey were deliberate and inevitable; but it was difficult for
e direct and businesslike American mind to comprehend
e casual — or affected? — lie when the truth would have
en far less trouble. Ordham, unless driven to the wall —
hen he lied as coolly as if it were a sort of royal preroga-
ve — thought no one worth a deliberate fabrication.
ut he had an instinctive dislike of the obvious, and all the
tle affectations of his class. He was sometimes auda-
ously candid, but he rarely thought in a straight line. The
it of the day said of him, several years later, that whereas
l the English were liars, the Scotch more liars, and the
ish most liars, Bridgminster was the only man he had ever
et who could lie with the simplicity of a savage, the grace
an artist, and the blandness of an Oriental. Therefore
hen his opportunity came would he prove himself the
eatest diplomatist in Europe.

At eleven o'clock he stood watching the charming pro-
sion of women in their flashing jewels and trailing gowns
ng down the long gallery, candle in hand, when Mabel
sed him.

Shall you come over soon?" she whispered, with her
d on one side in the fashion which seems to be peculiar
merican women when begging their lords not to stay
ate. Ordham looked at her in surprise and a faint
of displeasure, but he said kindly:

am afraid not. The men sit up late — those that
not been out, you know. I cannot well leave them."

ou leave them when you are tired of them in the
fast enough." Mabel looked pretty, even when she
l, but her husband replied calmly:

u should get to sleep as early as possible. I'll look
and see if you are awake, but better put the light
drop off."

n sleep in the morning, and I hardly see anything
now that we have such a lot of company."

ought you wanted house parties."

"I did — I do. But I did not realize that they would separate us so much."

It was on the tip of Ordham's tongue to remark that he did not fancy any man saw more of his wife, but bethought himself in time that this might sound ungallant. Nevertheless, he was tired of reiterating his adoration when he wanted to go to sleep or to talk with people whose minds were engaged with less personal matters, and he had, perhaps unconsciously, drifted into the habit of seeking his couch as late as possible. He often assured himself that he loved Mabel as much as ever (of course), but love was entitled to vacations, and a man should feel that his soul was his own, not his wife's. Mabel had been well coached, and her woman's instincts were sharp, her brain calculating, but she loved with as much passion as her nature was capable of generating, and no woman in love avoids mistakes. Love made her insistent, demand constant verbal demonstration, until Ordham sometimes felt that if called upon once more to reiterate "I love you," he should give full rein to the sulks which so often arose in him. But Mabel reasoned that he was hers, he had received proof that she had married him for love alone, why should not he seek her every moment when he was off duty as host, instead of compelling her to resort to wiles, coaxings, tears? She was still astonished at the discovery that the ceremony of marriage had not put an end to all effort. Where was the happy ever after?

She drooped a little at his last words, and the change from her grand air was so sudden that he said contritely, although an angry flush rose to his face, "You know that it is my duty to take all possible care of you, but I'll break loose from the smoking room as soon as I decently can, and wander over."

This promise he forgot before she was out of sight. Leaving the men to take care of themselves, he sought a little room off the library which his father had used as a den and he had appropriated to himself. He locked the door behind him, and opening his desk, took out a letter he had received that morning from Margarethe Styr but had not yet found time to read.

XLVI

OUR FIRST GLIMPSE OF BRIDGMINSTER

He had appreciated at once that it was a letter, not the usual note with which she had infrequently favoured him. Once before he had received a letter from her. It had arrived while he was in Purgatory and he had not opened it for a fortnight. Then, absorbed as he was, he had read it twice, so delightful was its quality. It was evident that not the least of Styr's gifts was the epistolary, a common enough gift in her sex, but reaching the superlative degree when the woman has brains, experience, subtlety. As he opened this long letter, written on numberless sheets of thin foreign paper, he suddenly realized that he had looked forward to the time when he should have leisure to correspond with Margarethe Styr. Rarely as he faced it, he was still uneasily conscious that he had not been quite fair to this woman with whom he had enjoyed so deep and unique an intimacy. He knew there was a bond, that it was not severed, perhaps never would be. But he believed that he never again should seek her deliberately, for he had no desire to dislocate the even and, all things considered, delightful tenor of his present life; moreover, she was inaccessible save for a day now and again, or during some brief vacation he might pass in Munich. He was becoming dimly aware of deeper currents in his nature than those disturbed by his first love storm, dark and turbulent currents, perhaps, which his wife could never undam; but this was one reason the more for immuring them. Although his body had lost something of its inertia in this new life that took him so much out of doors, still was his hatred of bother, exertion, his dread of possible upheavals,

no whit abated. Moreover, although it was now some time since he had admitted that he never should find companionship in his wife, still had he no wish to hurt her. She was, at least, a wife for pride, and although he had every intention of seeking his mental companionship elsewhere, still had he no desire to combine it with intoxications that Mabel must discover. As he stared at Margarethe Styr's long letter, still half opened, he admitted, with that blunt candour of which he was signally capable, that here alone was the woman who could satisfy not only his mind but those deeper currents which run and roar in man's maturer nucleus. This recognition, however, merely caused him to resolve anew to see no more of her. Correspondence, however — why not? He should enjoy sitting up after everybody — particularly his wife — was in bed, and living this purely mental life that ever had fascinated him in so many of its forms, enjoy it far more than assuring Mabel absent-mindedly that he loved her — of course.

He read the letter. It was an extremely artful letter, for Styr was at all times and above all things — for the present, at least — an artist. It was so deliberately clever that Ordham smiled again and again in sheer delight at its spontaneity, its naturalness. She talked irresistibly this midnight to her absent friend; and how much there was to talk about, to tell him! The letter was saturated with the atmosphere of Munich, an atmosphere of art, beauty, indolence, independence; a world in itself was that city on its lofty plateau, where poverty and "business" and the rush of modern life were almost unknown; an aristocratic, exclusive, segregated city, created as with a magic wand for pleasure, for dreams, not for work. No wonder he had found it difficult to study there. Never could he repay his debt to Lutz — and to this most wonderful of women. He sighed for his lost paradise, saw the gallery with its divan upon which he so often had made himself wholly at home! — and talked . . . and listened as she read to him . . . or to the Isar beneath the window, the birds in the green trees beyond . . .

She told him amusing anecdotes of his numerous acquaint-

ance, of the opera house cabal, of the King. And she was impelled to write to him upon this particular night, not only because he had been even more than commonly in her mind all day, but because of the news that he had been accredited to Rome, and she must express the hope that he travel via Munich instead of Paris. She had learned a new rôle — Katharine, in *The Taming of the Shrew;* he must see her in comedy. Perhaps he would not believe it, but the experiment was a success; the critics, even those that belonged to the opposite faction, thought her as good as in tragedy, and her ovation from the public had been tremendous.

He read this letter through eagerly, then again more slowly, the second time in search of something that had induced a certain uneasiness in his mind. It did not take a third reading to discover the causes — for they were two.

She assumed, as a matter of course, that he was about to embark upon that career for which nature had so consummately equipped him, and to whose aid fortune had flown as if with a conscious sense of duty. How often they had discussed that future of his; she was on fire to witness the beginning of what must be an historical career; it was strange and delightful to be able to believe that she had played her little part in his life, and she was almost as excited as before her own début.

But this was the least of the jars, and although it stirred and shamed him, not in a moment could he be roused from the pleasant sloth into which he had fallen. She had written little of herself, but that little upon careful reading assumed a dark significance. The King's moroseness and eccentricities increased daily. There were no more midnight performances in the Hof. And there were hints! He might shortly be relegated to a deeper obscurity still, and permanently. His expenditures were passing belief; drastic action by the government might be necessary to save the state from bankruptcy.

All this meant that Styr had lost her protector. The inimical party in the opera house, no longer restrained by

fear of the King's wrath, would conquer, drive her forth. It had required all the influence she possessed to obtain permission to learn two new rôles, and although her party was not contemptible, it was not likely that her friends among the opera house officials would go so far as to threaten Munich with their own loss were she driven out.

Perhaps the most deeply human trait in Ordham was his quick and sincere sympathy. He experienced it toward mere acquaintances in trouble or slighted by fortune. It gushed warmly for those he loved, and only dried when, sulky and obstinate, he turned his back after they had bored or otherwise alienated him. Then he could be as cold and unrelenting as if all his heart instead of that core were flint, and it is doubtful if he would turn his head to observe the most malignant straits to which the offender might be reduced. He shared this trait with certain women; the women whom too much desire has spoilt, and who mete out the extreme penalty to the man that bores them as coolly and remorselessly as the law disposes of its criminals.

Ordham was filled with pity and concern for this friend that had given him nothing but delight, and to whom he felt almost visibly linked by those latent vitalities which he would not permit to conquer his beloved inertia. But they shook him to-night. He rose and walked rapidly up and down the room. Driven from Munich, what would happen to this gifted unfortunate creature? There were other German capitals, but each had its *hochdramatisch*, who would use all her influence to exclude such a rival as Die Styr. She could merely *gast* about, with no assured income, while her lovely home was leased or sold. He had wished to think of her always in those intensely personal rooms which still seemed half his own, to see her moving about them with her noble pliant grace, or looking almost like a mere woman in that ugly rocking-chair. He had wished always to be able to close his eyes and conjure the vision of her Isolde, the notes of her great golden voice meeting in a rendezvous of happy birds in the cold classic dome of that opera house he had loved even before he knew her.

What ailed the world that it was so slow to accept Richard Wagner, one of the few positive geniuses it had produced? If he could but do something to rouse the British public at least, create in it a thirst for The Master, interpreted by the greatest of his pupils, surely that must add to their happiness. The most ignorant were often quite happy when surrendering themselves to the seductive charm of music, to that spell which enmeshes the facile senses and makes no demand upon a brain often tired out by nightfall. And what master had ever liberated from those mysterious centres of the musically gifted brain such a voluptuous perfumed sea of music as Richard Wagner? People that had been educated on the old barrel-organ operas had only forcibly to be introduced to the far more satisfying — intoxicating — music to crave it constantly, as the Germans did.

Suddenly he remembered that he possessed two hundred thousand pounds in his own right. To what better use could he put a part of it than to educate the musical taste of his country while assuring the future of the best of his friends? That a nice ethical point was involved in spending the gift of one woman upon another he would have dismissed as unworthy of consideration had it occurred to him. He was without conscious arrogance, but he had the blood of kings in his veins, as have all the older families of the British aristocracy, with or without the bend sinister, for Plantagenets and Tudors had married more than one daughter to a peer of the realm; and in blood of this order democracy is but one more affectation, or policy, or manifest of good manners, as the individual is composed; all tributes, therefore, are his natural due. Ordham would have shrunk with a hot blush from admitting that his wife belonged to a nation of upstarts, that her family pretensions were absurd, and that the god of circumstance had shown uncommon judgment in sweeping that river of crude American gold across the Atlantic to be properly enjoyed by one of a mighty people to whom that bundle of states owed its being; he would have blushed, but, driven to the wall, he would have set his countenance into the mask

of a type, opened his large cold eyes, and carelessly admitted it.

Therefore did he give no thought whatever to the source of his present affluence. Besides, not only would he have done as much for one or two of his old college friends, but he was meditating a great public service. To hold London by the nose until it swallowed, and assimilated, and bred an appetite for the greatest music ever written, what signified it if the artist who should help him to accomplish the miracle happened to be his dearest friend threatened with disaster? Not that he pretended to any such sophistry as that he was not thinking quite as much of Margarethe Styr as of London, more perhaps; but facts were facts.

And he knew that in no more direct fashion would she ever accept aid from him. Were she driven from one opera house to the next by the jealousies of the most jealous of all artists, unable to obtain a permanent position, she could support herself by teaching; no doubt, too, she had a small private fortune, and the villa was hers. But that was not the point. She was a great and a very ambitious artist. The voice was the shortest-lived of all Nature's gifts, and the voices devoted to the music of Wagner had an even shorter lease than the nightingales in the throats of the Violettas and Lucias. Something must be done at once. On Monday he would go up to London and ask advice of Hans Richter, who had conducted Wagner concerts with distinguished success, and whom Styr had met many times in Bayreuth and Munich. It must be the dream of his life to conduct a season of Wagner opera in London, and this could be made possible only if the experiment were privately financed. At this time Covent Garden was not a company; there was no board of directors to consult. It could be rented by any one that had the money to put up, so long as its traditions were not violated. Ordham knew that with Richter behind him, it would be possible to hire the opera house for a season — the season, were it not already disposed of; and that Styr could obtain a leave of absence either

through the influence of her friends, or by flying into a rage and goading the directors to break her contract. He could rely upon many of his aristocratic and all of his artistic friends to spread the fame of Styr before her arrival, make her the fashion, fill the house for the first night with all that prided themselves upon being fad tasters, avid for new sensations. Let them be manipulated to that extent and Styr would do the rest. The English might not be able to appreciate the wonder of her voice, might yawn miserably during those everlasting recitatives, but they would succumb to her personality, her magic and magnetism; for to these rare qualities no race is more susceptible; and the mere sweetness of her voice would enchant them no matter what their lack of artistic instinct.

And then! A triumph in London, and New York, already nibbling at Wagner, would give him at least a season's hearing and demand the Styr as a matter of course. Her fortune and greater fame would be assured. Ordham, as he strode up and down the room, had never felt so enthusiastic, so energetic, so inspired. He could give to England what Ludwig II had given to central Europe. He had never been sensible, save when Styr had deliberately played upon him, of wishing to be of any use to the world; but in these exalted moments, rattling those thin sheets of foreign paper (a link in themselves), he felt his first real impulse toward accomplishment, to stand for something, experienced the real awakening of that gift for leadership which has raised him so high among men to-day, but which, so far, had only manifested itself occasionally in an obstinate determination to have his own way. He felt his power, saw his future more clearly than he had ever done before.

His mind flashed to the woman who had always roused his higher and better impulses, while other women sought to make a Lucien de Rubempré of him; to-night she had transmitted to him out of her own stupendous energies — Good God! what had they not accomplished? — a tingling shock. She sent him his first opportunity to use his own energies, to taste the delights of power. It was

something of the rapture of the creative artist that he felt on that never-to-be-forgotten night, for although no composition took form in his quickened brain, the genius of his personality came to life, the fires of his own peculiar gifts crackled in a mind created for the world's use. As he finally made his way through the silent house to his room, he admitted with delight that he owed those moments of temperamental rapture, this awakening of his vital forces, which reached far beyond introducing Styr and Wagner to England, to the mate of that secret part of him the world would never suspect. His wife's door was ajar, but he did not even glance at it. He made haste to get into bed, and, with the functional regularity of youth, was asleep in five minutes.

XLVII

A FAIRY COMET

MABEL was not a congenital liar. She had, indeed, displayed a fairly truthful record until John Ordham came into her life. When little, she had been duly punished for telling the fibs natural to childhood; and, during the years that followed, those faculties with which the social unit adapts itself automatically, and economically, to the exigencies of the moment, had in her case been put to little strain, indulged young beauty that she was. She was a good girl in all ways, and after turning on the fountain of those beautiful crystal tears, or terrifying the parent whose solitary passion she was, she had the grace to be ashamed of herself, vowing never to repeat the offence. As she grew older, she broke this vow less and less often.

But the long coaching of her mother and Lady Bridgminster had wrought its inevitable work. She was merely one more victim of the disabilities of her sex. She could not go frankly forth and woo the man to whom she had immediately surrendered her heart; she must scheme, and wait, blow hot and cold, demoralize her character generally. She had no cleverness save in female craft, but she was vaguely conscious during those weeks when Ordham wooed her with a silken rope round his neck and a padded prod at his back, that the crystalline quality of her girl's mind was permanently clouding.

She had assumed, of course, that after marriage her influence would be paramount. Had not momma ruled poppa? Was not the ascendency of the American woman one of the truisms of the century? She rode gayly into the breakers of generalities oblivious of the rocks beneath, whose other name is facts.

The result of that triumphant little confession in the library had given her self-confidence a profound shock. As time went on she found her husband more and more of a mystery, caught blinding glimpses of wants far beyond her comprehension, of dissimilar tastes, of an almost world-old brain, and, in spite of his youthful ardours, of an inner impenetrable reserve. She had almost despised him at times during the courtship, so easy had been the game, so completely had he been deluded. But Ordham was not a man to be despised for more than a moment at a time, and he had won her complete respect on that fatal day in the library when he had given her to understand that when people were so simple as to lay their cards on the table no will but his would prevail. But after the lachrymal attack was over (genuine enough upon this occasion), she had reflected that the cleverest of men would be no match for three clever women if they kept their cards out of sight. She had lost no time calling to her aid Lady Bridgminster and her mother, and a new campaign of gentle manipulation began. Live on the Continent she would not; where one could never drink water and the food ruined one's complexion, where she must be taken in to dinner by an attaché, instead of by a prince of the blood, where she must play fourth fiddle to old frumps with frizzed fronts and bugles and not a tenth part of her income. Not she. Jackie could have all the career he wanted in England.

She was enchanted at the idea of having a baby, not only because she possessed all those charming feminine instincts which would have made her an estimable woman had circumstances permitted, but because it gratified her to feel one of a line, to be the indispensable connecting link between one Bridgminster and the next. It is only the well-born American that is deeply impressed with the antiquity of English blood, of a descent in which figure historic names; for all these represent what they feel they have just missed, and to capture them for their issue is a triumph far more subtle than that experienced by the American who belongs to the aristocracy of wealth alone. Not

that Mabel was capable of any such analysis, but her mother was; the instinct was in her, however, and it is doubtful if she would have adored Ordham as blindly and devoutly as she did had it not been for that long record of his family in Burke, and the magnificence of Ordham Castle. But, to be sure, minus these causes, and he would not have been John Ordham.

Once more he was unconsciously demonstrating the inferiority of his sex when pitted against hers. But like many another, she forgot that there is a psychological statute of limitations, also that it is impossible to watch the manœuvres of an enemy whose existence is unknown. She was pouting in bed late on Sunday night, wondering if her husband intended to sit up until dawn again, almost hating the social triumphs that so oddly separated them, when the door between their rooms was pushed softly open and he entered.

She was lying in a mass of pale green satin and lace; her bedroom had been done over and looked like Undine's bower. Her hair, spread over the shimmering counterpane, might have been the golden fleece. No more enchanting vision was ever presented to a young husband; but Ordham was suffering (slightly) from conscience, and the familiar picture did not appeal to him. He kissed her affectionately, asked her solicitously if she were shockingly tired, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I must not awaken you in the morning," he remarked. "I thought it better to run the risk to-night — to tell you that I must go up to London for a few days. I have some business to attend to."

"What? Business?" She sat up straight, and she was so astonished that grievance stood off. "You never had any business in your life. You don't know the meaning of the word."

"But it is time I learned. I wish to consult my solicitors in regard to certain investments."

"Well, I never!" She stared at him for a moment. Then she asked plaintively: "Am I not your wife? I *expect to share* all your worries, although I can't imagine

swered promptly, looking straigh
unclouded eyes: "Yes, I have a
has some rare books that I am to
"We go up to London before
keep."
"Not these, I am afraid. Ther
quite as keen as I am on first edit
She explored those large inge
not a jealous nature, and she had
tunity to observe how little his de
lenging eyes meant, had often la
took him seriously. So the possib
net in London she rejected with
of antagonism took possession o
that she could not understand hi
really deferred to her, that he must b
Still more did it incense her that
priving himself of several days o
could think of no ruse to keep hi
whipped up a storm, and against t
been warned by the doctor. As f
them until the Continent threaten
surprise, she lay back in her pillow
manner:

"Four days will seem very long."

She uttered these artistically simple words with a quiver of her little pink mouth, which was not altogether deliberate, for although she was determined not to be commonplace, those four days without her husband unrolled before her in an endless procession. He felt very contrite, and kissed her fondly; but he did not retreat from his purpose. The next night saw him in London, enjoying himself hugely at the theatre, from which he had been divorced for nearly three months. It so happened that there were a number of good plays on, and Hans Richter was out of town when he arrived. Mabel received long impassioned telegrams and brief impassioned notes, apologies and explanations that would have hoodwinked a wronged and suspicious wife; but the castle did not see him again for ten days. Then he was so charming, so repentant, so indignant at a cruel destiny, and so unfeignedly happy in being with his lovely little wife once more, that he was not only forgiven, but Mabel, in her joy at having him again after that dreary watch, was persuaded to move up to London a month earlier than she had intended.

XLVIII

THE GREAT PRIZES

THE hopes that rise insistent in the cold discouraging mind when the first shock and depression have run their course have their origin, no doubt, in the subterranean chambers of the brain; mean, when it is a case of outraged love, that the soul is continuing its eternal struggle for completion with another soul. These are immemorial rights, and do not endure disintegration and change every seven years.

Margarethe had passed through many phases, not only since the night she had heard of Ordham's engagement, but since the beginning of her deliberate correspondence with him. As is commonly the case, she found more satisfaction in the writing of her own letters than in the reading of his; although that excited, hopeful, terrified, tremulous, forlorn waiting for the post was a new and astounding experience. Men, the cleverest of them, are indifferent letter writers, and Ordham was no exception. A woman lets her pen run on with a freedom and felicity which conscious art but intensifies, the while it exercises selection and restraint. But men are prone to say what they have to say in the fewest possible words, rather rejecting all subjects but the essential than wandering afield in search of others that might make their compositions interesting.

Although Styr, in a manner, enjoyed this correspondence even more deeply than her personal intercourse with the man who had strolled into her inner kingdom and taken possession (for it gave her a sense of greater intimacy, liberated her imagination), she was too wise to give alarm to his limited amount of masculine endurance by writing

him twenty pages when she was artistically capable of packing news, gossip, personalities, disquisitions upon books, the opera, the drama, and politics, into ten. Nor, although she longed to write daily, did she gratify this new passion oftener than once a week; and even so, she cultivated a certain irregularity, that the assured appearance of a too familiar envelope on his morning tray might not in time inspire him with that nervous irritability which so often takes shape in ennui. Not for nothing had she been forced to accept man as her chief study before Wagner transposed her from life to art; but she hated these restraints, longed to be natural. She knew, however, that, given a man of Ordham's temperament, only nature heightened by art could hold him, never nature unbridled and ingenuous.

Ordham's disposition was so far from frank that although while within her magnetic radius he had been more confidential and revealing than he had ever been before, he could not shed his diplomatic shell with nothing but a sheet of paper before him, headed "Dear Countess Tann." Moreover, with all his soul he hated letter writing, and only answered these fascinating epistles with a reasonable promptness for the sake of others to come. If she had tacitly agreed to write alone, he would have been completely happy. And she, of course, wanted a running picture of his daily life at Ordham, of the companies assembled there, of trivial but always interesting personalities and incidents. But he could as easily have written a book; the bare suggestion would have appalled him; and, while making his letters as short as decency would permit, he confined himself to a brief comment upon the literary and artistic people invited to the castle, music, and books — he sent her many new ones — and devoted the last page to herself, expressing his desire to see her again, and his regret that their summer had been all too short. Sometimes she smiled at these laborious epistles, and sometimes she flung them across the room and stamped her foot. She had to read them over and over to extract any comfort out of them; then, finally, she succeeded in reading between the lines, rewrote them, in short, as women will.

There were times when she intensely disliked him for his apostasy to herself, his weakness in being blindly steered into a commonplace attack of puppy love when he should have risen superior to the follies of youth and gone unscathed till thirty, then loved some one worthy of him. She hurled him from his pedestal and rolled him in the dirt, announcing that he belonged there, delighted with the sense of emancipation that permeated to her finger tips. Not even yet did her mind dwell upon the possibility of any closer union with him; she dreamed only of the insatiable mysterious immaterial tie; she indulged herself in attacks of bitterness, of furious regret that he had not so ordered his life that she might think of him always as the exceptional man, instead of seeing, against her will, a vision of a love-sick white-faced youth, idiotically in love with a pretty girl, then as a fatuous young husband complacent to all the selfish whims of his bride; drifting with her on a river of gold that threatened to rise and suffocate what energies he had. If he must be "managed," she was the woman for this office, for she would have steered him to greater goals. She was a thorough woman, was Margarethe Styr, but her saving grace was that she knew it. When she laughed at herself, then was Ordham forgiven, excused, dusted off, and restored to his pedestal, his sovereignty in the realm of the ideal.

When there crept into his letters — after the return of his household to London — a tinge of sadness, deepening at times into melancholy, more than a hint of impatience at enforced inertia, at passing opportunities; when his polite desire to see her again began to vibrate with something like passion, then did she understand that not only was he tiring of his wife, but that her own letters, with their insidious but unremitting spur to his ambitions, were reaping the harvest she had planned. It was after one of these letters of his, longer than usual, more personal, asserting that could he but find a decent excuse, could he but exercise his freedom at this time without brutality, he would take the next train for Munich, that a voice seemed to cry through her brain: "Let him alone! Let him alone! In

silence and absence men forget." This spasm of conscience brought her face to face with a good many possible results that she had ignored; and as she really loved him and was fairly consistent in her desire to see him happy and great, she delayed her answer to this letter, half resolving to drop the correspondence.

Then, a week later, arrived a letter charged with a curious hotchpotch of anger and jubilance, an astonished sense of semi-defeat and almost royal triumph. He had not given her a hint of his scheme to organize a season of Wagner opera at Covent Garden, for, although hopeful at the first, he had met, upon his return to London, with so many objections and difficulties, so much ignorance, prejudice, and pharisaical folly, that he had at times despaired of attaining an object which opposition fanned into a passion. But, calling to his aid older and more influential men than himself, the last barrier had finally gone down, and although he could not hire the opera house for the season, owing to other contracts, he had succeeded in capturing it for five weeks by depositing, as a guarantee against failure, twenty thousand pounds with the committee he had formed. Of this guarantee he naturally made no mention to Styr, but had he been able to conceal the fact that the enterprise was his, a letter received in the same mail from the great conductor would have enlightened her.

She was infinitely touched. If resentments had lingered in her mind, they were swept out, and they never returned. She knew — who better than she? — what all this had meant to that indolent nature, steeped in self-indulgence. For the first time in his life he had really exerted himself, worked to accomplish an object, and not for himself, but for her. He wrote with enthusiasm of being the means of educating his country musically with her assistance, and there was no doubt that he assumed this responsibility in all sincerity, but he dwelt upon it too emphatically in his desire to save her from any sense of obligation. The deeper tenderness of her nature was stirred; it was the first poignant sweetness in an affair that had already given her *far more joy* than sorrow, pleasure than dis-

appointment. Moreover, there was a new and a very keen delight in the gratitude she was forced to render to this noble but torpid nature, which she had revealed to itself, to be the first object of his energies.

But she hesitated some time before she accepted the formal offer to sing in London from the first of May until the seventh of June. She vowed anew to spare Ordham the certain disaster of materializing their bond, and herself as well. But this offer arrived very opportunely in her affairs. The King came no more to Munich, summoned her no more to his castles; and although, owing to her popularity with the public, and the still potent shadow of Ludwig, the opera house cabal might not dare to compass her sudden dismissal, they contrived that she sing less and less, gave her the worst support of which that admirable company was capable. Their object, of course, was to wean the public by degrees, to insinuate that the Styr had grown capricious, indifferent to her once beloved Munich, was losing health and nursing her voice; to tickle the Bavarian love of variety with as many *Gasts* as they could command, to press against her cold resistance until she lost control of her furious temper and flung her contract in the face of the *intendant*.

This she had no mind to do, and her will was as strong as theirs combined; but she was worn with the unremitting silent struggle, the countless mortifications; she knew that the death or deposition of the King would push her hard against the wall, battling for the supreme position she had held so easily. Now, through the influence of Princess Nachmeister, or the Queen-mother, she could obtain the signature necessary for a leave of absence. Then, London conquered, she knew that Munich would clamour for her return, and, with or without the support of the King, her position would be impregnable for a long time to come. For the matter of that it must be the first step in that greater career which her ambition had never ceased to picture. She had written to Damrosch several months since, but had received the reply she had expected: the artists were already engaged for the first Wagner season

in New York; but it was expressed in a tone of sharp regret that she had written too late — even, perhaps, for that projected second season, were the experiment a success; but she had not the least doubt that did she create a furore in the most musically indifferent of all cities, to which, however, New York bent the knee, a place during the second season would be made for her as a matter of course.

And after London, she also would be invited to sing in every capital in Europe, with the possible exception of Paris; although to be sure she might sing to the public that still visited their hatred of Germany upon Wagner, in such rôles as Dido, Aida, Fidelio, Donna Anna, Katharine, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and even the Countess, in *The Marriage of Figaro;* for after all these years of daily vocalization, besides her stage experience, there was little she could not do with her voice, and it would be interesting to prove that she could subdue that tremendous organ to pure melody. She was not even sure that she should not attempt Carmen, as a tour de force; and she could act it! Great God, how she could act it! She had only to conjure up Ordham's marriage in all its details.

And how she should revel in the conquest of New York, look down with serenity or laughter from the unassailable position of the season's idol upon the mire that had nurtured her, and upon the good respectable people that held their skirts so high, shuddering at the mere acknowledgment of the horrors upon which they danced, or lived their comfortable lives. She wanted no social recognition from that great city, where so many proud names covered secrets little less appalling than her own; but to dominate where she had once shrunk far from the limelight, to be crowned where she had been despised! — little she cared for the sleuths of the press. Their revelations would but excite the public the more, for that public almost resents the reflection of their own necessary virtues in a great prima donna, her failure to indulge the rights of genius.

But she hesitated, for John Ordham could not be shoved long from the forefront of her mind, — that young friend who

would annihilate her worries, who had unrolled this glorious future. It would be a poor return to wreck his life. But was she not sure of herself? That, after all, was the whole point. She had managed him before, she could manage him again. She must live in a hotel, she would meet many people, five weeks pass very quickly. She could strengthen the bond, deepen her influence, even while she avoided the dangers inherent in mending a broken intimacy. . . .

Yes, she would go. What was more, she would make sure of his career before she left London, raze forever his wife's selfish defences. Little she cared whether the silly child had married him for love or not; her possible sufferings were of no consequence whatever. She would not break up his peace in the common fashion; but give him to Europe she would, and his wife might console herself with her baby and the great position for which she had schemed quite as much as for the love of this exceptional creature to whom she had but the flimsiest, the most transient rights. Not in nine short years could Margarethe Styr swallow ten whole commandments.

Nevertheless, perhaps unconsciously, she possessed the large vision, the contempt of petty detail, of obstructing means, when a great end promised. There were times when she put even herself out of mind, and saw Ordham, his fine and peculiar abilities in full flower, moving his sure hand among the destinies of Europe, making as sure a place for himself in history. Of what earthly importance was the possible happiness, or the crushing, of one more American girl in the face of a great and useful career? She was, in truth, a negligible quantity.

XLIX

THE SPIRIT OF THE RACE MOVES ON

MABEL, seated in a high-back Gothic chair, looking, in her ample flowing gown of white brocade embroidered with gold, her soft mass of "harvest-yellow hair" caught on either side with a jewel in an antique setting, like a cross between Rossetti's Monna Vanna and his Venus Verticordia, wondered if this mob of people would never go. It seemed to her that all London, fashionable and artistic, lived in her mother's drawing-rooms, and she wished that it had occurred to her to take a house of her own. True, the suggestion would have precipitated another discussion about that tiresome diplomatic future to which "Jackie" alluded now and again as a matter of course (he had returned to the Foreign Office), and, no doubt, it was as well to be relieved of all detail and care at this time: she felt well, but tired. Moreover, confident as she was in herself, normally, she had discovered that it was no light task to amuse a man who had been born bored, and that if he were to be kept in England, he must have its cream served up daily.

She congratulated herself, however, that she was growing cleverer every minute. Her husband had no suspicion that his departure for the Continent was to be delayed upon one pretext after another until pretexts were no longer necessary; did he retain his interest in diplomacy, the time would surely come when the Foreign Office would have no more of him. His good humour was unruffled. He was more kind, more captivating, than ever, and so considerate that his delicate young wife saw little of him. He sent her to bed *early, and took* himself off to the theatre, that "he

might not keep her awake by roaming round the house; he had never gone to bed early in his life." He made her lie down immediately after luncheon and remain on her couch until it was time to dress for the afternoon drive. Between half-past five and seven they had a crowded salon. He never had luncheon or dined away from home, and, like the courteous soul he was, entertained formally or familiarly those whose invitations he and his wife were obliged to decline for the present. It was the dinners that, for the most part, were informal, consisting of intimate friends of his mother or the Cuttings, whom he did not feel obliged to follow up to the drawing-room. The luncheons, or "breakfasts," as it was the fashion to call them, were often imposing functions.

Of the impromptu afternoon salon he was even more the gay and fascinating host than at Ordham. No longer were Mrs. Cutting's drawing-rooms the studiously select assemblies of the ante-Ordham-Bridgminster régime. True, there were many of greater social importance than she had mustered unaided, as well as that bevy of smart young American wives of English husbands so famous during the eighties, but in addition she found herself receiving all the prominent artists, authors, actors, poets, æsthetes, musicians, and many — discoveries of her son-in-law — not yet famous but indisputably endowed. It was Ordham's grief that Rossetti had died before he was able to do him honour, but he consoled himself by buying every picture of this consummate painter that found its way to the market. As they did not harmonize with the light, almost frivolous, effect of the drawing-rooms, he had them hung in the stately entrance hall downstairs, which Mrs. Cutting had left untouched that the effect of the French rooms above might seem the more brilliant by contrast. They lit up those dim spaces with their living colours, and Ordham often sat there alone. As available Rossettis were few, and he had an almost equal admiration for Burne-Jones, several fine paintings of this artist shared honours with the master. They would accompany him to *the Continent*.

Mabel, although at first delighted to be admired by artists, especially when they told her that she looked like The Blessed Damozel, to deck herself in Pre-Raphaelite gowns designed by her mother-in-law, and sit in a Gothic chair, was grown, in this month of March, heartily tired of it all, and confided to her maid that as soon as she was well again she should send æsthetic duds to the old-clothes man, order a trousseau from Paris, such as even she had never possessed before, and become the smartest woman in London. Her husband might continue to have his artists if he wanted them, and they would cut their hair, but she had been born to grace another sphere.

Moreover, she was irritably tired of all this talk about Wagner and that Munich prima donna; London, always on the alert for a new fad, seemed to be obsessed. Five weeks of Wagner at Covent Garden! She devoutly hoped her Jackie would not demand that she sit in the back of his box and share his raptures. With all her little barrel-organ soul she hated Wagner; but she had not forgotten those carefully prepared appreciations of the courtship, and dared not retract them so soon after that first misguided confession she had worked so hard to obliterate.

At the end of five months she had progressed far in matrimonial tactics. But what a protracted mental campaign it was! And she had pictured a rose garden for two light-hearted lovers! Well, there was compensation in all things; she had become clever, at least. She might have married some nice, simple, unexacting person like poppa,—a gentleman who had attended strictly to his own affairs,—and become one of those undeveloped little American matrons who brought letters to them, and whose husbands talked of nothing but business or football. She felt her infinite superiority to all of them, happy and bright as they were; although there were times when she longed for the mental rest which one of these fine busy young fellows, whose brains were not crowded with their ancestors, would have afforded her. And how often she longed to be natural and free. But she was a true female; she adapted herself *readily enough* to her lot, at times thoroughly

joyed the atmosphere of intrigue in which she felt herself moving, sure that in the long silent tussle of wills, she, with the superior tact and finesse of woman, must conquer. If Ordham had been a bold masterful person, such as his brother Stanley would be one of these days when his shyness had worn off, she would have knuckled under as a matter of course, enjoyed with all her feminine soul the battles royal which preceded each sure defeat, while remaining "good," and "natural," and "above board." But the Machiavelli in Ordham had pumped to the surface all those obscure currents of intrigue and deceit which track through every woman's nature. It was a strange circumstance, this secret pursuit of John Ordham's ego, in the mysterious regions of the spirit, by two women at the same time; but they hunted on different planes and never met.

The last caller drifted out and down the stair. Ordham returned, and bending over his wife, asked her solicitously if she was tired.

"Not in the least!" said Mabel, brightly. All the married women she knew told her that men hated tired women. "How interesting you have made our salon, darling. Mother, can you imagine how we were ever satisfied with just smart people before?"

Mrs. Cutting shrugged her shoulders, but smiled indulgently. "We never receive those people in New York, but no doubt we make a great mistake. Genius ought to be recognized, and when artists and others are quite convenable, I certainly think they should be encouraged to remain so. Besides, it helps them to meet patrons."

Ordham concealed a smile and replied gently, "I feel greatly honoured that they should come to my house." Mrs. Cutting noted with some amusement that he characteristically assumed that this splendid mansion, leased, furnished, and supported by the Cutting millions, was his own. But, although she too had some time since discovered that she knew him very little, she liked him too well to feel more than a passing irritation. In her own way she was in love with him, as mothers often are with a charming young man come suddenly into the family as the husband

of an idolized child. It is the only opportunity a woman has to love a man with a passion that is not legitimately sexual or maternal, but a little of both, boned of both danger and responsibilities.

"I might point out," continued Ordham, "that we are not the first to receive the great in art, although, naturally, they prefer their own circles. But even this absurd æsthetic movement has been of service to London society, for it has popularized art, at least, and permanently banished antimacassars. It only remains for some culinary genius to follow in their track to make England almost as inhabitable as Paris or Italy."

"Don't you love your country, Jackie darling?" asked Mabel, wistfully.

"Of course. But I was born, remember, when the Brotherhood, unknown to the herd, was commanding the attention of the elect, and of these my mother aspired to be. Naturally I became imbued with a love of change as well as of beauty; quite as naturally I find it necessary to gratify both out of England."

"It is odd that you should be so different from your brothers," interposed Mrs. Cutting, hastily.

"Oh, they are all reversions to the ancestral type, Ordhams from marrow to skin. My father did not like artists, and in time, my mother, being a dutiful wife, got her gowns from Worth until he died, although permitted to invite Rossetti and a few others to her big parties. And she had much political entertaining, political work generally, to do; she had little leisure to cultivate that side of London."

"Well, I am rather glad she has followed her natural bent since," said Mrs. Cutting, pleasantly. "Those nice Burne-Jones gowns she wears — or are they Rossettis? Frankly, I can't tell the pictures of one from the other, except that Burne-Jones's women seem to be longer and thinner, particularly as to neck. I wonder what beauty Rossetti could have found in incipient goitres."

Ordham got up suddenly and lit a cigarette some distance away. Less than a week since he had received a

letter from Count Kilchberg, in which that gentleman, innocently regaling him with the gossip of Munich, mentioned that Frau von Wass had no goitre, had been shut up by her husband, suddenly jealous of somebody, no one could discover whom. The story ran that the Nachmeister had opened the eyes of the Herr Geheimrath in order to save some friend of her own from the clutches of the fair Hélène. No key was necessary for Ordham, and his conscience had given him a bad hour, although it was with a pleasant sense of relief that he realized he could do nothing. He had accordingly locked up the memory again, and was irritated with his mother-in-law for liberating it. But when he turned, he said carelessly:

"That was Rossetti's chief fault in his last years, and due, no doubt, to failing eyesight and too much chloral. Talking of throats always brings to my mind the great Styr's. That is one of her assets. It really is as like a column of ivory as mere flesh can be. I have taken a box for the Wagner season, and hope that both of you will go with me to every performance."

He hoped nothing of the sort, but he knew he was quite safe in expressing himself with propriety, and words never cost him anything.

"How wonderful five whole weeks of Wagner will be!" cried Mabel, with glittering eyes.

But Mrs. Cutting felt herself at liberty to be quite frank. "The first night; thank you very much. No doubt it will be a great sight. I understand the Prince has promised your mother to go, and of course that means the world. But I have no hesitation in admitting that Wagner bores me to extinction, no doubt because I cannot appreciate him. But I was raised on composers whose characters do not talk interminably in a sort of singing register, and I am too old to be converted. You do not mind my frankness, I hope?"

"Of course not. But Mabel must come, as she loves all music, and has heard nothing but *The Mikado* for months."

"Occasionally," said Mrs. Cutting, playfully. "But for a while yet we must be inflexible guardians."

"Of course!" Ordham smiled into his wife's eyes, but in truth was ill at ease and screwing up his courage. After all, this was not his house, and there was a point to be settled before Margarethe Styr arrived in London. He had delayed the inevitable discussion as long as possible, but now seemed as propitious a time as any; and although he did not suspect the cause, it had by no means escaped his attention that these people were at all times anxious to please him. He attributed it to the fact that he was English and they Americans, but thought it very nice of them.

He strolled over to the table again and lit another cigarette, came back to his deep chair, and turned his charming smile and large ingenuous eyes upon his mother-in-law.

"Did I ever mention that Countess Tann is quite a friend of mine?"

Mrs. Cutting also braced herself. She, too, had anticipated this crisis. "I think we spoke of her the first time we met again in London," she answered vaguely. "But you are such a diplomat! I should hardly know the name of a single one of your London acquaintance if they did not come to the house. I don't think you have ever mentioned any of your Continental friends. I doubt" —with a brilliant smile—"if your left hand is on bowing terms with your right."

"How can you say such a thing? How very odd! It seems to me that I must often have spoken of Countess Tann—she was so very hospitable to me in Munich. I met her at Neuschwanstein, where we both were guests of that strangest of all strange mortals, Ludwig of Bavaria. Otherwise, I might not have met her at all, for although Munich society is at her feet, she goes about very little. No doubt she opened her doors to me because we are both such good friends of your own good friend, Princess Nachmeister, but she certainly showed me marked hospitality, and I shall be glad to return it here in London."

There was an ominous silence. Mrs. Cutting fanned herself vehemently, a bright spot in either cheek. Ordham, his nervousness conquered, looked at her steadily. Mabel

twisted the ears of LaLa until he squealed and ran off in dudgeon.

Mrs. Cutting spoke at last. "Do you recall any of our conversation on the subject of — a — Countess Tann?"

"Was anything in particular said? I recall the fact of a conversation, nothing more."

"I think I expressed my disapproval of that sort of people. On the stage, of course, it doesn't matter; but to ask them under one's roof — that is quite another question. Of course, no one knows better than yourself, dear John, that a man has many acquaintances his family cannot receive."

"I don't think I follow you," he said wonderingly. "You spoke just now of feeling it a duty to encourage artists by social recognition. You surely have no objection to the stage — above all, to the operatic stage?"

"Oh, not at all! But I have to this Countess Tann." Mrs. Cutting, driven to a defence of her principles, was the woman to fling social diplomatics to the winds.

"What objections have you to Countess Tann?"

"It is not possible that you have not heard all the — gossip about that woman?"

"I have heard gossip of every woman I have ever heard discussed at all. Gossip is the relaxation of overburdened minds, and most minds are burdened one way or another. I cannot understand your attitude to Countess Tann, when you receive — " and he mentioned the names of several women notorious for more than beauty and fashion.

Mrs. Cutting flushed. "They go everywhere," she said tartly. "Nevertheless, I have received them only to please your mother; it has been under protest, even although nothing against them is proved. In time I shall tactfully weed them out."

"There are no proofs against Countess Tann."

"I am afraid proofs could easily be had. You were in the next room only this afternoon when Mr. Levering entertained a group of us, not for the first time, with reminiscences of Margaret Hill. That, he asserts, is her real name, and he not only saw her year in and out in New York, but knew her personally."

"Levering is one of those rheumatic old beaux that sit in club windows and manufacture scandal. There is no wheat in his chaff. And what a cur to run about prejudicing people against a woman who has no man to defend her, a woman so great, for that matter, that it is a presumption to gossip about her at all! I shall cut him."

"Dear me, I had no idea you could bring yourself to do anything so direct and undiplomatic!" Mrs. Cutting laughed, but she was growing angry. "And do remember that he is not only a very old friend of mine, but a power even here in London, where he has come every season for twenty years."

"I have nothing to fear from Levering," replied Ordham, coldly. "He is not even a second-rate Englishman, and these transplanted American men that have nothing better to do than invent or peddle racy gossip in order to make sure of being asked every night to meet a title or two at dinner are not taken very seriously by us."

Mrs. Cutting made no reply for a moment. She realized that her son-in-law rude must be very much in earnest. Her American soul rose in wrath, but she kept Mabel's happiness steadily before her, and finally said, in her usual calm even tones: "I am afraid it is all true. We won't discuss poor old Levering. I have heard of Styr from other sources, and although it distresses me greatly to refuse you anything you wish, I fear I cannot receive her under my roof."

"Granting that these stories are true, what difference does it make?" No tones could be more even, more mellifluous, than Ordham's. "She is a great artist, many hold the greatest living. Shall we be more provincial than Munich, which receives the artist with no reference to what she may have been ten years ago, on the other side of the globe?"

"Why should artists be treated as if they were different from ordinary mortals?"

"Because they are."

Mrs. Cutting set her lips in a straight white line. "I *recognize only one* code of morals. We Americans are

brought up on splendid old-fashioned principles. Nor do I recall anything in the Bible that might be construed as exempting genius from the code that is necessary to preserve society from anarchy."

Mabel interposed hurriedly. She knew that on certain points her mother was rigid, and she, too, regarded people that misbehaved themselves with shocked disapproval. But it was too soon to put her husband on the defensive. "Mother dear," she said, in her clear little voice, "don't you think you might relax your rule for once, as Countess Tann is a friend of Jackie's? Besides, perhaps it is our duty to encourage these people when they are trying to do right. Both Princess Nachmeister and Mr. Levering say that her life has been exemplary in Munich. If we snubbed her, we might drive her to the bad again."

As she concluded her little effort she looked eagerly at her husband, expecting a flash of gratitude from his expressive eyes, and not only for coming to his rescue, but for refraining from the common jealousy of wives. But Ordham averted his gaze, conscious of a still more intense irritation. Mabel was not clever enough to play her part in daily intercourse, little as she suspected it; and there were times when she quite forgot the rôle she now knew it was necessary to act in order to reinspire her husband with the belief that he had married the ideal woman. Few women can spend their lives in full dress. In humbler walks of life than Mabel's, the wife exhibits herself to her husband in curl papers and untidy wrappers. Mabel's toilettes would have been perfect on a desert island had her trunks been washed ashore, but to let her mind run down at the heels was a temptation not to be resisted, now and again, for had she not bagged her quarry? And although she schemed to please her husband, adopted all the wise advice of Lady Pat, crossing him in nothing and surrounding him with diversions, still would she read no more books, still would she chatter; and she avoided "clever" men and women as she would the plague. To know how to manage a man was cleverness enough; what she did not know was that deft management, while it may achieve certain results, is

not always redolent of charm. Ordham avoided her by the aid of every device his fertile brain could suggest, for he dreaded the moment when self-restraint would snap and betray him into wounding the poor little thing. She might be a silly child, but he appreciated that she loved him devotedly. This uxorious affection, however, was irritating him in more ways than one. Since their return to town hardly a day had passed that she had not given him a present. Extravagant and wealthy, it delighted her to shower costly "trifles" on her husband; his rooms were littered with superb and superfluous baubles. The new cigarette case in his pocket was of gold incrusted with jewels, the old silver necessaries of his dressing-table had been replaced with gold; he had now five watches, eight cigarette cases and match boxes, fourteen ash trays, three sets of white pearls of the first water and one of black, more cuff links than he pretended to count, four sets of furnishings for his writing table, one of gold, one of Russian enamel, one of Dresden china, and one of antique silver; and so on, ad infinitum. Many of these precious objects were inscribed "Jackie."

Only that morning it had occurred to him that all this stuff represented a sum far in excess of the wretched thousand pounds which had caused him so much torment and debasement of spirit, and he had felt not only vexed at the senseless extravagance, but sick of saying "Thank you"; the constant repetition of which phrase creates in time a sense of obligation fatal both in love and friendship. Feeling that if called upon once more to tell her, upon her daily return from Bond Street, that she was the most marvellous and the most generous creature in the world, he should disgrace himself, he had announced with playful decision that she must waste no more money on him; he could not accustom himself all at once to such extravagance, had a vague sense of defrauding the poor — these were the only excuses he could think of. Mabel, who had heard of his princely expenditures in Paris on an income of £500 a year, was astonished, but inferred that he still felt the difference in their fortunes, and had too much humour to re-

turn her presents with the money she had given him. But nothing had been further from Jackie's mind than this delicate hair-splitting. The £200,000 he regarded as a right and proper marriage settlement, not as a present; he had never mentioned the subject to his wife. And whereas nobody liked making presents better than himself, he made appropriate ones; and if he gave none to Mabel, it was because he could think of nothing she did not possess already.

So he avoided her eyes when she flew to his relief, left his seat once more, and with his back to them ground his teeth. He had himself well in hand, but he was still too young to have at his absolute command that gay and impenetrable mask, that perfect suavity of manner, for which he is celebrated to-day. Nevertheless, he always rallied his unevenly developed gifts in such crises as these.

"I don't think it is worth while to discuss the question from an ethical standpoint," he said in a moment, turning to his wife with a smile on his lips and none in his eyes. "Countess Tann, admitting that she ever dwelt without the pale, will not be driven back by any act of ours. She has the strongest character of any person I have ever known. The question is merely this: I feel under certain obligations of hospitality to her which I should be glad to discharge, and she is a great artist who gives the world far more than it can ever give her in return. Granting that she is this Margaret Hill of Levering's, society is now too deeply in her debt to consider anything but the interest it must pay as long as she remains in the position to demand it."

"I quite agree with you — up to a certain point." Mrs. Cutting had almost visibly choked over the largest doses of British insolence she had ever been called upon to swallow, but she forced her lips to smile. "I am quite willing to take a box at the opera, show myself often, and lend it to my friends at other times — there are so many Americans in London just now. I am not as young and as modern as you are, but at least I should never dream of boycotting a stage artist in her own sphere; I am as ready as any one to acknowledge the debt of the ordinary mortal to genius.

And nothing has ever distressed me more than the dreadful tales of gifted people dying in garrets because a selfish world would not pause to listen to them. But never, willingly at least, have I received under my roof a woman of blemished reputation. My mother and my grandmother were both leaders of society in New York, and that was their inflexible rule; I was brought up on it. As you English people are so much more — charitable, let us call it — I have endeavoured to make up my mind to believe no gossip unproven by the divorce courts; but really, some things are a bit too flagrant, and one professional beauty, at least, who was here this afternoon will never come again by invitation. And if I decline to receive a woman who has fairly blossomed in the sunshine of royalty, and who is well born and bred, I can hardly be expected to receive a creature that began life as a social outcast. I do not assert anything so foolish, of course," she added hastily, "as that we have not a certain small percentage of wicked and foolish women in American society. I am merely emphasizing the standard of the country, and I for one shall continue to uphold it as a matter both of principle and inclination."

"Both are highly commendable, but, it strikes me, a trifle provincial and inconvenient. In a new country I can understand that you must draw hard and fast lines, but now that you have come to live among people that are quite sure of themselves, why not emulate their independence? It has struck me more than once since I have had the pleasure of knowing so many Americans, that we have more independence, freedom, under our old-fashioned monarchy, than you under a form of government where those words may be worn meaningless with too constant iteration; you seem to have an idea that their antithesis is aristocratic."

"I don't think you see my point." Mrs. Cutting's tones were so even that they were monotonous, and she fixed her eyes on her fan. "You English aristocrats indulge in the fiction that you are above all laws, are a law unto yourselves. You are mental and moral anarchists. With us it is quite different. It may be because we are new, but one thing is quite *positive: our* standards are higher than yours, and

they are fixed. We are as free of mind as you are, but we don't choose to use our freedom in the same way. We reverence the laws we have accepted from the highest authority, because they are right and proper laws, because they conduce to purity of conduct and true happiness. But you — you English might exist on a planet of your own. And yet you are a mass of contradictions. Mr. Wilde was lamenting to-day, for the fortieth time, of British provincialism, respectability, philistinism. Others make the same lament. I have seen little of it myself. You — I am talking of your class, of course, — use those characteristics as an excuse when it happens to be convenient. To be just, I have not the slightest doubt that most of the women I meet are faithful wives, but it is only because the reverse does not appeal to them; they would admit, if pushed to the wall, that the laws made to govern the conduct of common mortals do not apply to them — certainly not! But if their anarchy — or, shall we say, their insolence? — does not take that form, it does some other. The only absolutely well-regulated women, according to the American standard, that I have met in England, are, it would seem, survivals from your middle class."

"It is irresistible, dear Mrs. Cutting, to ask why, since you admire your own country and despise ours, you have come to live among us?"

Mrs. Cutting raised her cold angry eyes and met the cold impassive eyes opposite. Even had she been less fond of him, the utter absence of insolence in his voice and face, the repose and detachment of his manner, would have compelled her admiration. He continued with a smile: "It would be a genuine deprivation were you to leave us in a fit of disgust, but I am afraid you will, one of these days, unless you make up your mind to take us as we are, swallow us whole."

"It has occurred to me once or twice of late that I may return to New York." She paused a moment and then continued deliberately: "It is an intensely disagreeable and humiliating conclusion to have come to, but I believe that I am a snob. It annoys me the more as I have no justifi-

cation, like so many of these Americans at present going the pace in London, wild with delight at being able to address peers of the realm as 'Bertie' and 'Billy.' Even the founder of my family in America helped to model its social structure. What is the secret of this fascination of England for the well-born of the United States? Perhaps its mere picturesque contrast to our republican institutions, architecture, customs. Perhaps some harking back of the blood. Perhaps it is an unconscious attempt to live the literature of our childhood, where all the fascinating characters were kings and queens, lords and ladies. Perhaps the sleepless American instinct to go straight to the top, that 'the best is none too good for us,' as our slang so patly expresses it. Perhaps because you have reached the superlative, while we are still in the comparative degree. No doubt, however, the reason, or all the reasons, are given the complete and final expression in that one hideous little word, 'snob.'"

Ordham had never felt so much respect and liking for his mother-in-law. His eyes softened and he said solicitously: "I hope you are not unhappy here. Surely no American has ever been so well treated."

"Ah! There is another point. One must live in, not erely visit, England, to discover that its reasoning runs mething like this: 'We do not say, of course, that you e not as good as we are — pray, what does that matter? t you are different, and being different, of course you not quite as good.'"

Ordham laughed heartily. "I never heard it so cleverly !" The warmth in his voice and eyes brought the ur back to Mrs. Cutting's face, the animation to her ce. "Indeed, you must never leave us! We should you too dreadfully. And you are one of us — really! — ver some stupid people may regard the majority of ricans. Is not my mother devoted to you?"

low devoted do you think Lady Bridgminster could any one?"

h, I was not thinking of affection. She never pre- to much of that. But with whom else is she so *e?* — *and* at least you have never found her rude."

away and leave me?"

"Not for a while yet, darling
feel that the time will come when
ourselves with a yearly interchang
at Ordham as if bracing herself
out. We like each other too well
ter to come to a complete unders
continually bringing up unpleas
disgusts me more than this Engli
call personality. To receive pe
their social rights merely because
able personal charm, have painted
book, is putting a premium upon
'artistic' hordes that hardly dare
thought second-rate. Nor do I in
sincerity of all this kow-towing to
and bored people, you must have
to it!"

"Does all that mean you wil
Tann?" He stood up, looking ap
in-law, whom he liked better for st
inconvenient as they were to hims
together, after his fashion when ne

deigned to coax. "No — I am desperately sorry, but I cannot. You must not ask it of me. If I forced myself to take that woman by the hand, I should lose my self-control and be rude to her. But, indeed, to touch her would be a physical as well as a moral impossibility. I am very sorry. I hate to deny you anything."

She swept out of the room hastily, and Mabel looked apprehensively at her husband, who, for the fourth time, was striking a match with his back to her.

"Jackie!"

Jackie gritted his teeth, but answered politely, "Well, Mabel?"

"Are you angry with me? It is too severe of mother."

"Of course not. How can you say such a thing?"

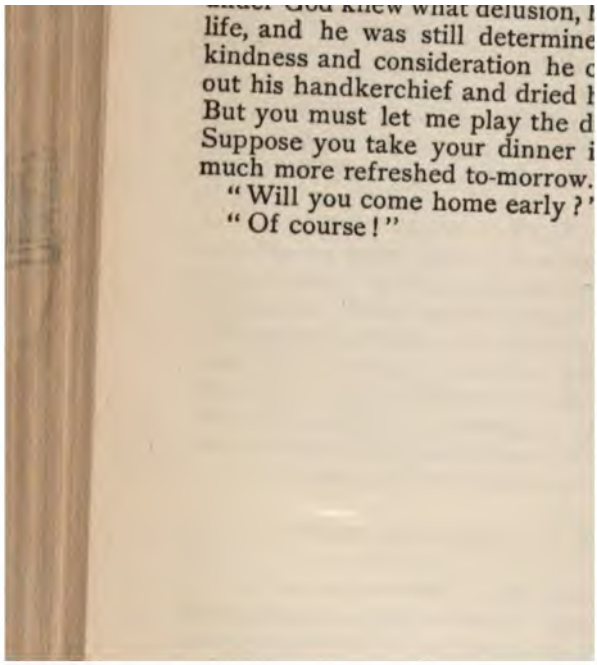
"Well, you have a right to be. But perhaps I can talk mother over."

"I am sure you cannot. But it doesn't matter. I fancy Countess Tann will understand — she is an American! Besides, no doubt we have wasted a lot of talk and temper over nothing. She will be much too busy for society. Your mother might have sacrificed her principles by leaving a card. A Wagner prima donna who is to sing eighteen times in five weeks, besides rehearsing with a scratch company, would no doubt herself spare you the indignity of meeting a woman who not only has been as much gossiped about as some eight or ten that were here to-day, but who hails from the ranks —"

"Jackie! Please don't talk as if we were dreadful snobs."

"On the contrary, I think your mother did herself an injustice. What more natural than to prefer England to America? Besides, she has the courage of her opinions — I think nobody, certainly not Americans, appreciates that sort of courage as much as the English. By the way, you will not mind if I dine with my mother to-night? I have rather neglected her."

"Your mother dines out every night of her life! Do you really mean that you will leave me if I beg you not to?"



life, and he was still determine
kindness and consideration he c
out his handkerchief and dried h
But you must let me play the d
Suppose you take your dinner i
much more refreshed to-morrow.
"Will you come home early?"
"Of course!"

L

THE ROOM IN THE TEMPLE

ORDHAM did dine with his mother, whom he knew to be alone, but he left her after coffee, and drove to the Temple. He roamed about the gardens for a time, watching the ghost shadows of the ancient buildings, the blue-black mystery of the river that it took an American artist to interpret; then made his way to the Inner Temple and ascended to an upper floor, opening a door with a latch-key. The gas he lit revealed, not an office, but a comfortably furnished den, the walls covered with the red paper dear to the heart of even the exceptional man. There were several boxes of cigars and cigarettes on a buffet, a tea service, a roller desk, manifestly locked, and on the walls all the photographs he had taken of Styr during their summer. They were really creditable performances, and he had put them under glass, not only for personal reasons, but because he fully appreciated their unique value, even though he had no mind that any eyes but his should behold them. The collection represented Styr in every costume familiar to opera goers: in her Fedora gowns, in other home toilettes, and in Alpine costume leaning on her staff against a background of rocks, the cross on Kochel, and the glacier above Berchtesgaden. Several times Fräulein Lutz had been induced to snap the camera and take them together.

Ordham had now revelled in this unsuspected refuge for something over two months. At the castle Mabel had been too much occupied to enter his rooms save now and *then on a sentimental* excursion; but in the comparative

seclusion of town and increasing ennui, she not only wandered in and out of his rooms perpetually, whether he were there or not, but took an inexplicable pleasure in upsetting and rearranging his things. This was a phase of matrimony for which Ordham was wholly unprepared, although he recalled an amusing picture Styr had drawn of one phase of the American household: the front bedroom the common sitting room; formality, much less exclusiveness, practically unknown. He had assumed that among the wealthy classes, accustomed to large houses, life would be planned on the European scale; but while he was given his own suite as a matter of course in Grosvenor Square, the ancient instinct was planted in Mabel, whose ancestors had been simple democratic folk to whom the traditions of their new country were dear, despite their social eminence. It never occurred to her that what was her Jackie's was not her own, nor was it in her to suspect that she could fail to be welcome at all hours and seasons.

Ordham had been amused at first, but not for long. When only his opportune return diverted her from a cabinet which contained Styr's letters and photographs, he was so incensed that he nearly ordered her out instead of gently conducting her forth to admire a new picture. After a day of black, albeit invisible, sulks, that gift for compromise which seldom failed him came to his rescue; and a week later found him installed in The Temple, with solitude within and beauty without, and only the roar of the Strand in his ears. Here he wrote his letters to Styr, read and reread hers, smoked, and dwelt upon the happiness of the past summer, as his eyes travelled from presentment to presentment of its heroine. He also enjoyed the sensation of deceiving his wife, for he felt that it was even a duty to balk a gregarious nature like that, and this secret life that he shared with Styr alone was eminently agreeable to the future master of the diplomatic art. Too proud to write of his disappointment to his friend, however her presence might have tempted confession, the very fact that he had taken this room as a solitary retreat would have told the whole story to his acute correspondent, even had not that atmosphere

of melancholy superseded the subtle exaltation of those letters written from Ordham when his energies were humming and he was excited with a foretaste of power.

He lit the fire and a cigar, and settled himself into the ample Morris chair, but not with his usual sense of unqualified delight. Heretofore, when he had entered this room, it was to banish all unpleasant thought, all haunting doubt; but to-night he intended to open certain water-tight compartments and look squarely on their contents. He fancied that this unusual disposition to confront and probe must be inspired by the woman who had pricked his energies in so many other ways. Certainly, had he never known her, he would, after some such crisis as this evening's understanding with his mother-in-law, have gone at once to the theatre, postponed indefinitely the admission that his marriage was a mistake.

No man could be more direct, more outspoken, than Ordham when it suited him, and this was his chief charm for people thrown much in his society, — betraying, as it did, the cool courage under his listless habit, furnishing the high lights, as it were, for that formal indubitably diplomatic nature. To-night he put several facts into the plainest possible English. He was mortally tired of his wife, hopelessly disappointed in her. He could have resigned himself to her intellectual lacks, trusting to time and his own assiduous tutoring to furnish her skull respectably; but her character was so utterly without variety, depth, mystery, interest of any sort, that the task of stuffing the brain was not worth while. Neither time nor determination can create a personality, and to Ordham's mind people without strong individual characteristics were hardly worthy of visibility, no matter how admirable the shell. He had caught himself staring at Mabel in wonderment, half fancying he saw behind her that stately romantic elusive figure of his wooing, suggesting infinite possibilities. Had he been hypnotized, and where had she gone? True, Mabel was as beautiful as ever, as tall, her manners retained their grace, her head its lofty poise; but her features lost their dignity, her eyes their dreams, the mo-

ment she began to chatter; and heavens, how she did chatter!

He was still annoyed and embarrassed at this prospect of early paternity, still felt that this projection of himself would appropriate what was left of his youth; but at least it had the merit of causing a certain tenderness to linger. Not for the world would he have given Mabel a hint of his present evolution; he had only to remind himself of her pathetic condition to be delivered of the temptation. But later, when she was well again, strong, more tactless than ever in her renewed beauty and social successes, should he hate her? This was the ghost that had been tapping at his brain for weeks. He had no desire to hate his wife. It would be demoralizing, inconvenient, a constant source of irritation. Could he but crowd the world between them, wean her until she shared his own indifference, he fancied he could accept his lot philosophically; a well-bred ornamental wife was not to be despised. But inflict himself with her society and pertinacious affections he would not.

He realized now why his spirits had gradually sunk below their normal level, save only when the drawing-rooms were full of kaleidoscopic guests; morever, that resentment had steadily grown at the trickery which had brought him to his present pass, anger at his own unthinkable stupidity. True, he was now immensely wealthy, but a young Briton's only appreciation of money is in the incessant want of it, and, this passed, Ordham had almost forgotten that checkered interval between his father's death and his present affluence. Besides, it was now positive that his brother had a mortal, if leisurely, disease; his inheritance was but a matter of time. If these women had not made a fool of him, he should still be free — young.

But he was not the man to arrest his vision on the surface of his mistakes. He stared appalled at the sudden and vivid realization of all that true marriage meant. Mere mating, respectable or otherwise, that automatic opening of the door to a waiting generation always squatting on the threshold, was not for men like himself; the world

swarmed with those that asked for nothing better, and cared little whether nature blindfolded them or not; why could not he have been spared? Marriage — it was a portentous thing; no mere similarity of tastes due to breeding and experience, but, for highly organized beings, a thousand points of contact, mental, physical, spiritual, which compassed an unimaginable union; mystery and discovery; the quick response to half utterances, the same enthusiasms in beauties and pleasures forever hidden from the mass upon whose fertile surfaces grew the exotics of life; passions of soul and body such as only Styr could suggest when the music of Wagner set her free; immortality this side of the grave, — that was union in love as Ordham conceived it. And consciously or not, upon at least half a thousand points had he met and mingled with Margarethe Styr. The other half, of course, were not to be commanded in a mere romantic friendship, wandering silently with the woman in scenes made up of ice and stars, floating on sinister lakes between Plutonian walls, sitting in a dimly lit room above the murmuring Isar till dawn — but how wonderful it all had been! Had he really appreciated it?

When he left her, he had refused to ask himself if she loved him, but he knew that she did. It breathed in her letters, floated from them in an almost visible aura. From the faithful Kilchberg he had heard in due course of her stupendous performance of *Isolde*, knew that she must have received his letter immediately before it.

Did he love her? It was significant that he did not reply even to himself, "Of course!" But although he admitted it as frankly as he had disposed of his sentiments toward his wife, he was as yet conscious of nothing beyond a vast immaterial longing for that other part of himself, so full of splendour and terrible mystery. After some dodging he analyzed this paradox also: he was sitting in the forbidding wreckage of early matrimonial disillusions, his passions lay so deep under the torpors he had cultivated that they had been but superficially disturbed, and he was still *very shy*. But between himself and Margarethe

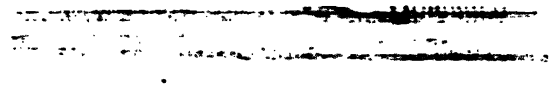
Styr there could be every response, every correlation, every analogue. It only depended upon circumstance or their own wills when that chemical affinity developed which sooner or later drives all lovers into each other's arms. In this hour of cold reasoning, of almost vicious hatred of all things pertaining to his condition, he hoped it would be late, or never. He had not the least idea whether he lived for that moment or wished that Styr had never crossed his orbit. It was his disposition to live on the surface — there was so much on the surface! A man might occupy himself with it for a lifetime, and far better than plunging down to eternal fires. He believed that the wise men of life were its dilettantes, and to be prince of the dilettantes had nature eminently equipped him. But alas! . . .

Of course he did not wish he had never met Styr! What nonsense! Not only did he owe to her all he was or ever should be, not only was he philosophical by habit and temper, but he should exult in the memory of her to the end of his days. He strongly doubted, however, if he wanted to add to those memories, in other words enter upon a different phase. Had it not been for the great advantages she must reap from this London season, he could have wished that he had left England to educate itself. He longed above all things to meet her again, and there was nothing which he would not have done to avoid it. Could they get through these thirty-five days in safety? They would be crowded with work and social engagements; possibly he should see little of her, and prosaic London was not romantic Bavaria. Did he emerge from this coming ordeal with that spiritual bond between them still unvitalized, he vowed that he never would see her again. The moment they ceased to play with love would be the first real moment of his life, and he had but a confused idea of what must come after; nor was it comfortable to speculate. It was not so much that he dreaded the energies of a real passion, as the recklessness they might breed. He had no wish to sacrifice his career, to be haled into the divorce courts, to be relegated to that

half world which exists for men as well as for women, particularly for young fools, there to be known as "Styr's lover."

And a career he was determined to have. He was become fully conscious of his abilities, his gift for leadership, his enjoyment of power. And if he had thought little or not at all of serving his country when preparing for the diplomatic career, he thought of it a great deal now. If much of his careless insolent youth had been buried under disillusions and ennui these last months, he found himself and life twice as interesting. Not lightly would he imperil that future which for the first time seemed vital and full. . . .

But *Styr? Styr? Styr?* He recalled the young heroes of Balzac and other veracious French realists, who wept as freely as women when a cruel destiny dammed up their love secretions. He envied them, but remembered also that one secret of the supremacy of the British race was that it used its emotions to feed its energies, and began to act while its more brilliant but less practical neighbours were spending half their forces in grief or rage. But this reflection did not abate one whit of his desire to be alone with this woman once more — he suddenly realized that it was growing from moment to moment, that his cold analytical temper had been displaced by throbbing pulses. He rose hastily, walked the room, lit another cigar, spent an hour reading her letters. They always translated him from the present, soothed as well as stimulated him, banished his melancholy, leaving only a pleasant sadness in its wake. He walked home toward dawn almost happy. Thirty-five days! At least they would have many talks. Thank God that "dark threshold," as she once had phrased it, had never been crossed, would hardly obtrude itself during this the last of their intimacies. And the antechamber was very large and of an inexpressible beauty. Not to compare with it were the commonplace mansions whose every corner was free to so many men, and for life. He was an ingrate. He would accept the good the gods brought him and take *devilish good care* not to cry for more.



LI

THE ROCKET WITHOUT A STICK

When a great audience assembles with an amiable desire to be pleased, agreeably titillated with the thought of a new interest in the wide and often barren ranges of the impersonal life, and with their vanity pluming itself upon inaugurating a new era, the object of their distinguished regard must fail ignominiously to convince them that they have made a mistake.

Covent Garden was filled from stalls to roof on the night of Styr's London débût, and the pit and the galleries were crowded with the true music lovers, who were mainly Germans. Princess Nachmeister, as well as Ordham and the enthusiasts he had enlisted, both in the fashionable and artistic world, had pulled the wires so subtly that practically everybody present fancied himself the discoverer of Styr, and hardly a person in the stalls and boxes but bore a distinguished name, either inherited or made. Ordham sat in his box alone. Mabel was ailing and her mother remained with her. He looked as impassive as he was nervous and angry; Styr had stolen into London, no one knew when, and he had not had a glimpse of her in private, although a few moments before he left Grosvenor Square he had received an invitation to lunch with her on the following day.

The opera was *Tristan und Isolde*, and Styr, delighted to sing it again after her long abstinence, gave the great rendering to which Ordham was accustomed. Although the fashionable part of the audience was reduced almost to idiocy before the end of the evening, particularly during the long innings of the tenor — second-rate, of course, on

such short notice, and at this season — in the last act, there was no question of Styr's personal triumph. The most bored remained until the end, and then gave "The Great German Prima Donna" an ovation. She had been called out repeatedly after the two preceding acts, but only twenty appearances after the final curtain satisfied an audience proud of its perspicacity, and generously happy in paying tribute to genius. The Germans shouted themselves hoarse, particularly when she dragged Richter out with her. All admired Styr's manner of receiving homage almost as much as her voice and acting. It was neither effusive like that of the Latin song birds to whom they were accustomed; she kissed no bouquets and baskets of orchids, although these tributes were many: nor was she the haughty gracious queen of fiction, after the fashion of certain actresses and prime donne, thoroughly spoilt or qualifying for social incursions. She merely walked out and showed herself, seeming to tower above them all, with the cold, calm, grave majesty of the Sphinx. She was Styr. She was theirs until the opera lights went out. They might look their full. She bent her head to the royal box only because custom demanded it; nevertheless, she throbbed with exultation, for she knew that the wires would carry her triumph that night to every capital in the world. Her fortune was made. Once she sought Ordham's eyes, and her own flashed out the gratitude she felt, then lingered for fully half a minute. When the ovation subsided, she obeyed a summons to the royal box, repaid compliments with the suave phrases of long experience, then, ignoring the crowd gathered about her dressing room, and numerous invitations to supper, went home to her frugal meal and bed.

Ordham walked restlessly up and down the large private sitting room in one of the Dover Street hotels where a table was laid for two. The Countess Tann, he had been informed, was dressing, begged him to accept her apologies; she would join him in ten minutes.

He roamed about for half an hour, so torn with annoy-

ance, doubt, and mortification, as well as resentment against the great and capricious Styr herself, that he was far from that mood of tremulous happiness, stung with fear, which he had achieved in imagination many times. It was abominable of Styr to steal into London when he had made up his mind to rise at four of the clock and meet her at the station. With this heroic act he had hoped to atone for certain unavoidable derelictions. It was the bitterest mortification of his life that he was unable to introduce his friend to London society under his own roof. His mother-in-law had deftly avoided a renewal of the subject. Mabel had sweetly vowed to break through that Puritan casing in which her mother dwelt like an antediluvian mammal (this was Ordham's image, not Mabel's); but he had chanced to overhear a scrap of conversation between the pair which convinced him that not only did she meditate nothing of the sort, but had joined forces with her mother and old Levering in acquainting London society with the variegated, manifold, and heinous iniquities of Styr's past. The favourite story, Ordham discovered soon after, was that "Peggy Hill" had deserted her starving and consumptive mother in the native mining town to become the squaw of an Indian chieftain, and had worn paint and feathers and carried pappooses on her back until a Western millionnaire had chanced along, offered her sealskin and diamonds, fought a duel unto death with the chieftain — who, wearing only feathers, had many vulnerable points — and carried the heartless mother to New York. There she promptly deserted him for a horse jockey, and after having figured as co-respondent in innumerable divorce suits, had opened a disreputable resort, over which she had presided affluently (when not in jail) until ordered once for all out of New York by the police. Then she had cultivated her voice, and, finding it a gold mine, conserved it with a fairly consistent exercise of virtue. This richly picturesque past, in which any prima donna might rejoice, delighted London, but it was hardly one to open the portals of society. London could stand a *good deal — but really*! There are lines! They would

applaud her in Covent Garden, talk about her over every tea cup; but extend to her the greatest of the world's hospitalities — hardly! The information that Munich society was at her feet they treated with the contempt it deserved. *Munich!*

Ordham had discovered with astonishment and no little humiliation, that although with money, energy, and finesse, he might import German opera to London and induce people to hear it, although he was popular, admired, and wealthy, he had practically no power socially. He reflected bitterly that this was not to be accounted for only by his youth, his brother's durability, the fact that he was not established under an imposing roof of his own, but that, much as he was liked, he stood for nothing, would be forgotten before he had lived out of London a month. He was a second son married to a rich American girl and living in the house of his mother-in-law. Who was he to presume to dictate to London society? Had he attempted it, he would have been put in his place as summarily as had he been an American himself.

And his mother had basely deserted him. Invited to join a driving party to the châteaux of northern France, she had left London with a hurried note of explanation to her son, feigning to forget the coming of his friend, but devoutly thankful for any escape from what was assuming the contours of a problem. She might rank among the independent women of London, rather weak on the subject of celebrities; but really! His grandmother doted on him, and he had approached her in the hope that she in her great rank and cynical indifference to a criticism that never could affect her, would help him out of his difficulty, enable him to return some of those hospitalities now bulking in his tormented imagination. But he had merely received a reminder of the duke's aversion from foreigners and disbursements, and much sound advice against making mistakes in his youth; society had cast out its own before. But he had no intention of insulting Styr by entertaining her without the countenance of his family.

His only success had been among certain personages in

the world of art, letters, and music, who, indeed, did not wait for his gentle manipulation; they were thankful for the opportunity to do homage to one of the world's great artists. Whether the ridiculous stories current were true or not hardly concerned them, but they assumed as a matter of course that they were incidental, having suffered more or less themselves. Styr was certain to receive a social ovation from the sets that Ordham privately thought the best worth while in London, but that by no means satisfied him; after all, they were not of his own class, and it was this class — in the eyes of the world, representative England — that he had set his heart upon honouring his friend.

As he wandered about, glaring at the walls and furniture, far too exclusive to be artistic (it was, indeed, early Victorian), he felt his temper rising every moment; he hated Life, that gave with one hand only to take with the other, that had contracted the habit of late of balking his royal pleasure. Nevertheless, he was able to reflect that it was as well many circumstances had combined to stifle the lover in him for the moment. This first interview was the only one he had dreaded. Could they but shoot those breakers even plain speech between them would not be fraught with danger. He did not need experience to assure him that when lovers, long inarticulate, meet after a separation not too long, those brain centres that check and regulate human actions are liable to suffocation by fire and flood. But, were all barriers razed, he was in too bad a humour to-day (he had also been forced to swallow effusive regrets from Mabel before leaving home) to find a corner in him for ardours. At the same time he sighed at this new evidence of the eternal contrast between the anticipated and the real; his tremours over this first meeting had been very sweet.

Nothing perhaps is so eloquent of the artless respectability of the British race as the composition of its older hotels: drawing-rooms and bedrooms rarely connect. (And yet an Englishwoman, visiting the United States for the first time, *innocently* remarked that she could see the

Americans were a virtuous race, as they used portières instead of doors!) The only door of Styr's sitting room in this expensive hostelry gave entrance to the public corridor. Ordham heard the hissing of under-flounces for a full minute before the door opened and Styr entered. Her cheeks were flushed. She wore a Fedora gown of white camel's-hair and silk, with a yellow flower in her hair and another in her girdle. He had never seen her look so lovely off the stage.

"It is too delightful to see you once more!" she cried with the warm hypocrisy of a woman who longs to fling herself into a man's arms and say nothing. "I know I am unforgiven for not letting you come to the station. But did you really think I should let you see me after twenty-four hours in train and boat? That was like a man! And now I have kept you waiting. But of course I expected that you would be late."

"How can you say such a thing? I wanted above all things to go to that train. I shall never forgive you."

"Ah! but had I let you meet me, I never should have forgiven myself. Shall we sit beside these delightful window boxes? I changed the luncheon hour to two o'clock — I woke up so late. Oh, tell me that I was quite wonderful last night. It seemed to me that I never had made a real effort before. I know that I triumphed, but I want to hear that you were satisfied."

Ordham muttered what banalities he could summon. It was evident that her spirits were high, whether artificial or not. She ran on: "Never, never can I express to you what this sudden and splendid opportunity to sing in London means to me. You are my good angel. What had I ever done that you should take so much trouble for me? Those examinations? Yes, for that I shall take credit till the last of my days. But even so —"

"There was no question of paying any debt." Ordham was scowling at the roses in the carpet. "I could not if I would repay you for many things. I have not the least desire to do so. I wanted you to come here and force London to accept Wagner. Of course you have become

the rage in a night. You will reconquer some seventeen times during this too brief visit. It is hardly worth talking about. I wonder if you will like London. Have you ever been here before? I forget."

"Never. Think of it! I had often visited the Continent before going there to live, but for one reason or another I never got to London. I am as excited at the idea of seeing as of singing to it."

He had recklessly brought up the subject, but he suddenly felt the meanness of every excuse he had concocted. Should he tell her the truth? Why not first as last? She would not be long discovering it. While he hesitated, she came to his rescue. Before leaving Munich Princess Nachmeister had casually remarked that she feared dear Adela was too puritanical to receive a stage artist under her roof; for the matter of that, the Anglo-Saxon races, compared with the continent of Europe, were so provincial on many subjects that she never met an English or American woman who did not make her feel as if she were the mistress of every man in Europe. But as regarded stage folk, it must be remembered that Munich was almost exceptional in its catholicity. In Paris, in Rome, in many other capitals, they were anathema outside their proper spheres. Therefore was Styr prepared for the dark brow and nervous manner of her friend. She knew that as he had not written her before this of receptions arranged in her honour and begging her to reserve certain dates, his family must have refused point-blank to receive her. She was hardly disappointed, for she had little of the American's romantic weakness for the social citadels of the old world, and she knew Ordham so well that her sympathy in any case would have been for him, not for herself. She leaned forward and said impulsively:

"Do promise me one thing! This is not only my first visit to England, but it may be a long time before I can come again. I want to be a tourist. I want to see all the sights. And to see them with you! Ah, fancy! Don't be haughty and tell me that you scorn sight-seeing. *Don't tell me that* you want me to meet a lot of tiresome

people. I have not time for both. Do you hate the idea?"

"Hate it?" He seized her hand and kissed it in his immense relief. "I should love it. I have never been inside the Tower, nor the British Museum, and only once to the Abbey — to a wedding. It will be too enchanting to have all those hours alone with you. We will go to Windsor and Hampton Court, Madame Tussaud's and the National Gallery, exactly like two American tourists. Promise that you will not go to a single place with any one else."

"I do not expect to see any one else except the opera house people."

"But — of course! — attentions will be showered upon you. It is most unfortunate that my wife —"

"Oh, do let me forget that you are married. We shall wander about just as we did in Bavaria, and in this crowded city no one will be the wiser. Will you take me to the Tower this afternoon?"

"Will I? Rather!"

His good humour was quite restored, and he spent an entirely happy afternoon, even condescending to share her interest in that mighty volume of tragic drama, the Tower of London.

LII

MATRIMONY

MABEL rustled into her husband's dressing room as he was giving the last careful strokes to his front locks, which he arranged in a manner peculiar to himself. He nodded to her absently, longing for the time when he could ask her bluntly to respect his privacy, since she was impervious to hints, and she wandered to the window and fingered the bright flowers in the boxes.

"It is such a heavenly day," she sighed. "Somehow, I never can grow accustomed to spending summer in the city. How — how — does Countess Tann like London?"

"She loves it, of course. Who does not love London at this season?"

"Well, it is certainly much nicer than to sing here in winter. I suppose she is perfectly wild over her success."

"She has never had anything else."

"But I mean in London, where no one, that is only a few, really likes Wagner. Some one said yesterday that, although Styr's personal success was beyond dispute, he feared the Wagner season would be a failure as a whole; five weeks of Wagner was more than any one not a German could stand, and if they give the Ring again —"

"They will do nothing so tactless. But *Die Walküre* is romantic enough to please the silliest and great enough to entrance those that really do know music. No other performance of *Götterdämmerung* will be given, more's the pity, for Brünhilde was always one of her two greatest rôles, and her rendering of it has deepened and even changed somewhat since I heard it in Munich. But no doubt it would fill the house only once — with people that want to be able

to say they have heard the Ring! Styr has also consented to sing Elizabeth and Elsa; her voice is rather heavy for those rôles, but a hundred people will go to hear *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* where one will even show himself at the greater operas a second time. The enterprise is not in the hands of fools — I know several members of the committee — and everything has been thought of to insure the season's success."

"How nice! Of course she is quite extraordinary. I am so sorry I could only sit through one act last night. And what a pity I cannot meet her. It is too old-fashioned of mother."

"You could leave a card on her."

"But, Jackie dear, she would then feel at liberty to come here, and after all it is mother's house."

Ordham turned to her with a rising flush. "Do you mean that you believe Countess Tann would force herself upon any one? I must have given you a strange opinion of her."

"Good heavens, Jackie dear, I hope you have not told her that we — that mother will not receive her. How dreadful!"

"Certainly I have not. But she does not happen to be a fool. She has now been in London ten days, and as neither my wife nor my mother-in-law has left so much as a card on her, don't you suppose she understands?"

"But surely you told her that I cannot go about?"

"You drive every day. There is no effort involved in leaving a card."

"But — how like a man! One can hardly go that far and no farther. If this were only our house!"

Ordham drew his lids together. "If it were, would you receive Countess Tann?"

But Mabel did not flinch. "Of course I would, Jackie darling. I would even defy mother — we could go to a hotel — if only I felt up to it. But I am a wreck and mother takes such care of me."

Ordham set his teeth and turned away, grimly reflecting that the one mental trait his wife possessed which com-

pelled his admiration was the neatness with which she could deliver a lie. She broke off the heads of several geraniums and then cried out, as if suddenly inspired with a bright idea: "Let us go to the country to-day. It is too utterly heavenly to stay in town. Let us take a long drive through Surrey."

"It is not good for you to take long drives."

"Oh, it won't hurt me a bit. We can rest often in those ducky little inns, and sit in the woods. It would be too delicious."

"There might be an accident, and I never should forgive myself."

"Oh! With our horses? One is always thankful when any horses of mother's will go off a walk. Say that you will!" She spoke with a charming girlish eagerness.

"I am afraid that I cannot. I have half a dozen engagements."

"But, Jackie darling, you ought not to make engagements for a whole day when you know how lonesome I am without you." Mabel fell headlong into the domestic snare, heedless of resolutions and advice from her mother-in-law.

He turned to her with the flush gone from his face, and said in the gentlest manner possible: "Should you mind if I asked you not to call me Jackie? I have often intended to do so. I hope you don't mind."

It was Mabel's turn to flush, and although her temper was not quick, her eyes flashed and her lips trembled. "Why?" she demanded. "Do — do you think it a liberty?"

"How can you say such a thing?" But although he spoke promptly, he was surprised to discover that she had put a latent resentment into form.

"Why," stammered Mabel, "you are *English*. I believe mother is right. But this — this is really too much. I wonder if you could ever understand that we Americans have exactly as good an opinion of ourselves as you English have of yourselves? Perhaps we too look down upon all *other nations*. We have the right to! United States

History is the only history that English people never seem to know anything about."

"You look too pretty when you flash with patriotism like that." Ordham smiled and kissed her lightly. "But you flew off at a tangent without giving me time to explain. It merely happens that I have always hated the nickname of Jack. In fact, I don't like nicknames at all. It seems to me that they deindividualize. Men that permit themselves to be called Bertie and Olly and Sonny might as well shave their heads or wear a beard. I was christened John, and I feel John, not Johnny or Jackie."

"Your mother calls you Johnny."

"My mother goes in for fads. Nobody else has ever dared to call me Johnny."

Mabel, always easily mollified, put her arms about his unresponsive neck. "If you had told me before, I never would have called you Jackie, although I love it, and John is so horridly formal. I shall feel as if I were addressing my husband's double, or something. Do you really hate it — Jackie?"

"Yes."

"Well! . . . I won't any more. But you must do something for me in return. You must take me to the country to-day."

"I really could not take the risk."

"Then take me to Kensington Gardens."

"I am so sorry — I think I told you I had several engagements. You see — you are generally occupied all day, with one thing or another. I have been thrown on my own resources, and now I cannot get out of these engagements I have made."

"But you always used to come home to luncheon."

"Now that you have so many American friends in London I did not fancy you would miss me; and as several of my own old friends are in town, I thought it a good opportunity to show them some attentions."

"Why don't you bring them to the house?"

"I could not think of fatiguing you, and men prefer to dine at a club, anyway."

The words "Margarethe Styr" were shrieking in Mabel's brain, but she was very proud, and rarely impolitic in any but small matters. Her mother had soothed her growing jealousy by assuring her that the great singer was far too occupied, now that all artistic London was running after her, to spare time for any man. Mabel could not crush her natural suspicions, particularly as she had discovered that he had once more thrown over the much-enduring Foreign Office, but she was determined not to alienate this puzzling young Englishman, whom she understood less every day, by "making scenes." "Don't bore him!" Lady Pat had warned her before leaving for France. "Give him his head and don't ask him questions. He would not confide in himself if he could help it. He worships you and is far too lazy to pursue any woman, or even to respond to her advances. But don't bore him."

Mabel, with all the American girl's independence of spirit, and firm belief in the inferiority of man, found such advice little to her taste, but, loving as she did, was willing to accept any that would help her to enchain her husband's languid affections. But more than once of late she had turned cold as she asked herself if ever she could understand him, become really intimate with him. And now, kind and thoughtful as he still was, another fear was whispering. It seemed to her confirmed by his refusal of her simple request. While she might control the more direct expressions of her jealousy, the temptation was irresistible to indulge in the ancient formulæ. She dropped her arms and turned away with a quivering lip.

"I don't believe you love me any longer!"

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Do you?"

"Of course."

She wheeled about and regarded him steadily. It occurred to him that she looked less vapidly pretty than usual.

"If you ceased to care for me," she said stammeringly, her eyes widening with fear, "you would kill me. I never *could stand it* — never — I think that is all there is to me."

"What a dear little thing you are. As if any man could help caring for the most charming wife in England. But you should have married Stanley, who is always exactly the same. I am afraid I am not. But as for the rest—do not be silly. Now I must run. Take care of yourself and don't think of going for a drive of more than an hour."

He tapped her on the cheek, dropped a kiss on her forehead, and departed in haste lest she think of a new argument. Mabel ran into her own room and fell on her divan, weeping wildly. But although she luxuriously let nature have her way for ten minutes or more, she finally drank a sedative, and then set her childish mouth in a straight hard line. There were several American women in England that had acquired conspicuous influence over their husbands — whom, no doubt, they had once had found as incomprehensible as her wonderful Jackie. If they had succeeded, so could she. It only required time and patience; and the return of her old buoyant health, which would enable her to companion him once more. If necessary, she would study politics and talk to old statesmen. But at this prospect she shuddered, and at the same moment her eye fell upon a shelf containing the works of Balzac, Maupassant, Bourget, and several other French authors, which one of her young married friends of their race had sent her, bound in white vellum, as a wedding present. They had been accompanied by a recommendation to read them and soon. She had never taken one from the shelf upon which her servant had arranged them.

LIII

LOVE

"KETCH 'em alive! Ketch 'em alive!" The fly-paper vender had the note of spring in his voice, and other and more distant street cries betrayed the same almost plaintive quickening under the influence of the warmth and light so long withdrawn. Ordham let himself out of the house looking as hard as he felt, but in a few moments the pagan beauty of the morning and the gay face of London in her springtime laughed his ill humor away and banished the memory of his wife. No city is more beautiful than London during her brief season of sunshine, with the flower boxes set like little Italian balconies on her grim old houses, the vivid close green of parks and squares, the endless processions of open carriages filled with smartly dressed folk from all parts of the world; some in the native finery of countries so far from occidental that they give the scene a touch of opera bouffe. As Ordham walked toward Dover Street he fancied he could hear the birds singing in Hyde Park — a colony that dwelt in a tree beside his bedroom window had awakened him early with their chattering — see the swans sailing on the lake in the park of St. James. It was good to be alive, good to belong by divine right to the one really great city in the world, and as he presented sixpence to several of his friends the crossing sweepers — more for the pleasure of receiving their blessing than because he had the least idea they needed it — he smiled at them so radiantly that more than ever they were convinced he was the sweetest young gentleman that ever gave siller, and 'oped he would be 'appy for ever and ever.

Ordham *felt that* he had every reason to be happy.

Were not he and Margarethe Styr going for a long day in the country, a long unbroken day? Although they had carried out their programme and visited many sights, still was it their first whole day together. Rehearsals demanded by the heterogeneous mass of singers they had been able to borrow from German cities had stolen many of her free days; she had felt obliged to attend three receptions arranged in her honour and receive once; and during the coming week practically all her spare time would be occupied with rehearsals for *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, for she had not sung the rôles of Elizabeth and Elsa for several years. But these hours they had snatched together had been wholly delightful, their spirits had been high to the edge of excitement; both took a nervous delight in playing with a danger that would soon finish, leave them face to face either with tragedy or a vast and cynical philosophy. It was tacitly understood that this was to be their last period of companionship, and although Ordham alternated between the pit of melancholy when alone and an almost fierce sensation of happiness while with this woman, whom he found more surely his than in the old days when his eyes were closed, he refused at any time to ask more of fate or to dwell upon the future. But that he was no longer the languid manageable youth of less than a year ago he knew as well as she. If he too put ambition before love, accepted the consequences of his marrying, it was because he chose to do so, not because of the woman's subtle manipulation. Ordham sometimes found an added food for sadness in the knowledge that he had left the best of his youth behind him, but was wise enough to congratulate himself that his acute attack of racial industry had cleared his blood of blinding humours.

But only to Styr was there any change in his appearance, and as he entered her sitting room this morning he looked the archetype of conquering youth, of splendid young English manhood. His mouth, which of late had often been consciously firm, was as soft and boyish as when they had met at Neuschwanstein, and his eyes, always luminous, were sparkling with anticipation. Not the least of his

attractions to Styr was his perfect grooming, for being artist as well as woman, she hated the sight of "artistic" men. She herself looked very smart, as he immediately told her, in an entire costume of tan-coloured cloth. As the day was warm and she could not wear a wrap, and as her tailor was the best in Paris, her frock followed every line and curve of her perfect figure. But as she had concluded to ignore the fact that Ordham was man as well as soul, and circumstances protected them both, she saw no reason for making herself clumsy and uncomfortable, as if he were a boy and she his guardian! Moreover, she was not averse from leaving in his memory as many charming pictures of herself as might be composed.

"How delicious it is merely to be alive!" she exclaimed with that enthusiasm which, when the sullenness of her face was routed by the mere pagan joy of living, was not the least of her fascinations. "Where are we going?" she added, as they entered a hansom.

"I have not the least idea." But in a moment he lifted the trap and directed the cabby to drive to Euston Station.

They alighted at Bushey, and, hiring a carriage for the day, drove or strolled through the old English lanes, with their high scented hedges, past houses built for subjects of Elizabeth, visited the tomb of Bacon at St. Albans, and even stared at the splendours of Hatfield House like veritable tourists, Ordham characteristically neglecting to mention that he had dined and slept there more than once. They idled on commons and in woods almost as full of light, lunched at the famous inn of Harrow, sat on the tomb favoured by Byron in the old town's churchyard, hung over high-walled fences to inhale the perfume of flowers that the island's moisture makes so rich, and to stare at the immense masses of pink and white hawthorn; bought fruit of a farmer (grown under glass, of course!) and sat on his wall to eat it. Few counties in England have more charms than Hertfordshire, and not its least is that it is practically undiscovered by the tourist.

They dined in the inn at Stanmore, dismissing their carriage, as they could take the train at this beautiful old

town, which invited them to linger as long as it was light. They soon forsook the enormous joints, the mess of greens, the peas as round and hard as marbles, and an apple dumpling like a tunnel filled with the débris of many wrecks, and wandered forth once more. The streets were very narrow, the houses, of a dozen centuries, covered with ivy close cut; the church looked as old as England. At this hour the little town was silent and outwardly deserted, but one expected every moment to hear the sound of a horn, to see the London coach dash round a corner, a post-chaise with a lady in powder and patches at the window. Stanmore is so close to London that it was the first town reached by the mounted courier galloping through the dawn to tell the country that Victoria was queen, but it is as old and quiet and forgotten as if it were lost in one of the great counties of the north.

Gypsy wagons were halted on one corner of the heath, and the women cooked supper in the early twilight while the men lay on the ground and smoked their pipes. Their children, catching sight of two prosperous strangers, ran without prompting to beg. Ordham and Margarethe gave them silver, then, declining to have their fortunes told, in other words getting rid of them, strolled out over the heath. This large piece of waste land is as wild as anything in America, broken and rough of surface and covered with tangled grasses and shrubs. Beyond was what looked to be a black mass of woods, but the glimpse of a gateway suggested that they might be but the generously planted trees of a park. A grey church spire of some distant hamlet stood out sharply against a red band of afterglow. There was an intermittent tinkle of cow-bells, but no other sound.

They sat down in the very centre of the heath and watched the twilight gather, that long English twilight without chill or dew which brings with it something of the mystery of night while still holding in a loose embrace the safeguards of day. At that hour the flowers smell more sweetly, the night moths flutter among them, and man feels that his day's work is done. A pungent scent rose from

the gorse of Stanmore Heath, but Margarethe, who had felt as exhilarated all day as if she were a girl unexpectedly alone with a man secretly loved, felt her spirits drop. She remembered who she was and one of her objects in coming to London. So far not a word had passed between them concerning his married life. They had renewed the old intimate friendship in snatches that made them eager for more, but had found much to talk about in the monuments they visited, the most tactful programme for Covent Garden, in many subjects of common impersonal interest. But Margarethe had determined upon at least one crossed and dotted conversation with Ordham, and she believed this to be the time.

Ordham, too, was silent, staring straight before him with an expression which Styr had seen before when words lagged, an expression of mingled abstraction, astonishment, and apprehension.

"I want the whole story," she said abruptly.

He turned to her with a start and flush. "The whole story?"

"Yes. All that has happened since we parted in Munich."

"I thought we were to ignore the subject of my marriage."

"To ignore is not to forget. I have tormented myself with so many versions — possibilities — how shall I call it? I want the truth. It will lay the ghost."

"I am afraid you will hate me. I was an inconceivable ass."

"No — it is wonderful that the story should be always the same and always different! But I hate generalities. I cannot go on confounding you with millions of other men. I want the specific incidents, your own version. A man's viewpoint is always his best excuse."

"Very well." And as his love for her had always appealed to the carefully secluded fount of truth in his nature, for love would be wholly truth were it not for life, he told the story from beginning to end, omitting neither the skilful plot he had since unravelled, nor his own abject surrender.

"I loved Mabel; there can be no doubt of that. I suppose that the long root of such love is the axis of life. It permits millions to marry every day that have little or no prospect of educating or even supporting possible offspring; but if they paused to forecast, in other words, if their brains were not in a state of toxic poisoning from this love secretion, whatever it may be, the race would soon put an end to itself. Perhaps in time the law will step in and forbid marriages before the man is thirty and the woman twenty-five. As for the turbulence of desire and suffering — after one has endured the acute stage for a certain length of time, there is bound to be a decline and reaction. Man simply cannot suffer and desire at concert pitch forever. Moreover, did the law forbid the banns, a man would take jolly good care to keep out of harm's way. But I know now that even had Mabel been all they made me believe, all that she looked, I should have ceased to care tuppence for her, although no doubt rather later. It is not necessary to explain the reason to you. A man may love many times in his life, but only one woman takes full and complete possession of his inner kingdom, as you have called it. Man is a sultan. One woman is his sultana; the others, absorbing enough during their little hour, are the caprices of his desultory harem. It is odd that his legal wife should so often be but one of these casual minor passions, and the woman he may never possess the one to persuade him of the immortality of love. It is a nice comment upon the makeshifts of civilization."

Styr stirred uneasily. She was white, for the story had cut her even more deeply than she had anticipated. It is not pleasant to hear your chosen idol draw a picture of his youthful passion, his first abandon for another woman. She had clenched her long hands, and a blast from the furnace of her soul sped in the direction of Grosvenor Square. But she answered judicially: "The first study of civilized nations is every possible precaution against anarchy. They are doing their little best; we can only wait until the world grows wiser." Then she laughed with a fair assumption of gayety. "It is something more

than humorous that I should be the one to say that, not you: I, Margarethe Styr, and you, John Ordham, so soon to be a hereditary legislator of the most wisely governed country on earth. Well! Never mind! I have played many rôles in my life."

"Will you not tell me that story now?" he asked eagerly. "You have half promised, more than once. And I am sick of outrageous concoctions. The truth could not be worse."

"The truth is always worse, when there is any foundation for gossip at all. No!" she said violently, her voice harsh with the revolt let loose by his own story. "I will never tell you. It is only because I have lived so much, suffered so much, weathered a thousand storms, that I have been able to listen to all you have told me to-night without hating you. Were it otherwise, were I ten years younger, it would be months before I should want even to look at you again. You could never stand a similar — a far worse test. This life may not be for us, but at all events you shall never hear from my lips what would make you — Ah! Bah!"

"Do you believe in another life?" he asked, tactfully ignoring this outburst, in which he secretly exulted.

"This inner life of ours does not undergo death and resurrection for nothing," she replied sullenly. "Nor is imagination a mere offshoot of the active mind. If it means anything, it means that somewhere, in some future incarnation, or on some more satisfactory planet, its supernormal efforts will become the facts of existence. And what then? Still subtler and more imperative wants that can only be realized in a higher state still? It makes one incline to Buddhism and Nirvana."

"Either way of looking at it is a poor compensation for the disappointments of this life, when you are young, at least; and when you are old, you don't care. The trouble is with civilization. We need a new religion. Perhaps the solution is in a combination of the Eastern and Western forms. It is as significant that Christianity has converted *but one-third* of the Earth's peoples as that the

remaining two-thirds are an anomaly in this eve of the twentieth century. The last are too supercilious in their ancient wisdom to borrow anything from us. We are raw conceited schoolboys, too ignorant, and worse, to help ourselves from their abundant stores. Perhaps the time will come."

Margarethe suppressed her feminine resentment at generalities in the twilight. "Well, that may be one of your many missions. But it was not a personal craving alone that made me demand the history of these last ten months. It is an immense relief to me to know that your eyes are opened, that you are no longer blinded by either love or cunning. I have a strong suspicion, and so has Excellenz, that they do not intend you shall go abroad. I have heard since my arrival of your wife's consuming ambition to be a beauty in London, of her detestation of Continental life, the third, or fourth, fiddle she would be forced to play for many years. They will keep you here if they can."

"I have heard nothing of all this, but I shouldn't wonder — and it makes no difference. As soon as my wife is able to travel, I go to whatever post is open to me. I should go the day you left London had I not given my word to remain here until September or thereabouts."

"And what if she refuses to go with you?"

Ordham smiled grimly. "I have not the faintest idea she will refuse to go with me when she is persuaded that no argument or threat will keep me at home. I can understand that she will hate to leave London, — England, — but she will accompany me. Small doubt of that."

Margarethe set her teeth. It was with some difficulty that she clung to the programme she had worked out before arriving in England. To manipulate him until his wife should be abhorrent and desertion inevitable, with the consequent scandal and disaster, was not the part she had set herself to play in his life. But when the rich soil of a woman's nature, long covered with the volcanic ashes of old passions, which conserve and fertilize, is sprouting with the roses and the toadstools of a new passion, the rôles of operatic masterpieces are mere play to that of the disinter-

ested friend. Margarethe had come to this renewal of their intimacy secure in the belief that her passions were either dead or safely entombed; but they had revealed themselves, insolent and powerful, when, shaken with the tumults of Isolde, she had met his eyes that first night in Covent Garden. She was appalled, but her will lost nothing of its strength, she had practised self-control for many years; and by one of those profound and obscure contradictions, ever manifesting themselves in human nature, her idealism recovered from its late inertia and entered upon a new lease. The more insistently and unequivocally love spoke, the more determined she grew that descend to that buried plane set thick with awful corpses she would not, those dead foul memories that must forever make the materializing of love mean but one more carnal experience. Once she could have idealized this bond, even had she known Ordham in her ignorant youth, a thousand times more had she met him with a mature mind and a past of even comparative ignorance; but now, the moment she gave herself, all power of idealism would be slain, and she believed that she should kill herself — perhaps him as well.

Nor was self-control an unendurable tax. She had passed that first and best period of reproductiveness, when passion drowns reason, nor had she reached that age when so many women fatally awaken to the fact that but a bit of youth remains and they had best make the most of it. Moreover, perhaps the vitalest point of all, she was a great artist with the world at her feet. Poor women, that had only their good intentions to bulwark them! She threw them a passing sympathy.

"Perhaps it is not necessary," she said abruptly, "but I should like your promise that you will permit nothing to interfere with your career, the public exercise of your best energies. I know that you will not reply, 'Of course!' and that if you make me the promise you will keep it."

"The promise is not necessary, but you shall have it if you wish. What else have I left? Were it not for that *prospect of future* usefulness and activity — I don't care

to think of what I should become — or be doing at the present moment."

"Speculation would be throwing away good time, for without the abilities which are driving you into a career you would not be you. But what you must husband at present are your opportunities. In some subtle way, your wife, supported by your mother, who seems to have great political influence — I believe you told me that two of her cousins or uncles are in the present cabinet? — might rear obstacles, create postponements, until the government wiped you off its slate as a trifler who was blocking the way of more serious men."

He sat up in a sudden fright. "I'll go to the F. O. tomorrow and ask definitely for a post in September, giving my word that nothing less than a mortal illness shall prevent my departure the moment I get orders."

She leaned forward eagerly, and, taking his hand, held it against her breast, which was neither cold nor calm. "You promise me that, you swear it," she whispered.

He trembled violently, his lids dropped, and he made a sudden movement as if to take her in his arms. She stood up.

"Gypsies have strong eyes," she said lightly.

"So much the better," said Ordham.

"If you kiss me, this will be the last time we shall ever be alone."

"Again, so much the better. I am going to kiss you, and I am willing to take the consequences. If you run from me, you will stumble."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her a great many times. And she knew that she should be eternally grateful to him for these few moments of terrified happiness he forced her to admit. But she was grateful also for the gypsies.

She disengaged herself and stood back a pace. "They are coming this way," she said. "You have not given me that other promise."

He stood before her, whipping one hand with the gloves he held in the other. His face was so white that it would

have looked dead but for the eyes, which were black and blazing. He answered steadily enough, however:

"I swear, since you will have it, that, as much to erect a monument to this love of ours, as to gratify my own ambition and compensate myself for the bleakness of my personal life, I will do what I can to make a great and useful man of myself."

LIV

THE CONQUEST OF LONDON

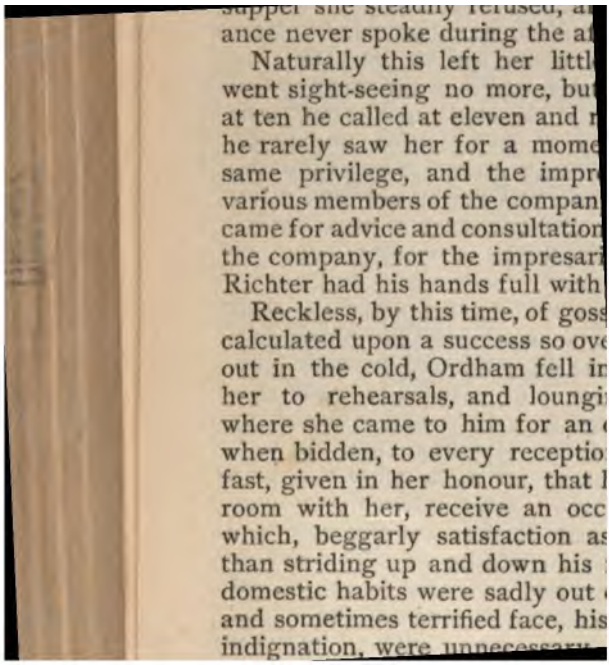
If the next twenty-five days passed quickly, it was not because they were barren of events. It was Ordham's idea that in the second performance of *Die Walküre* Styr should sing, not the vocally interesting but dramatically unappealing rôle of Brünhilde, but that of Sieglinde. Knowing that his race was the most remarkable compound on the globe of respectability and sensuality, he believed that the character of Sieglinde, portrayed with all the abandon of which Styr, alone of living singers, was capable, and yet easefully vapourized in the alembic of music, would give the Wagner season a fresh impetus; and the event proved him right. Styr, with a new need to give her imprisoned passions relief, acted the part of the faithless young wife, the incestuous demigoddess, with an emotionalism so deep and wild that the audience held their breath, and yet with a poignant sweetness that brought tears to their eyes, filled them with an immense pity for the captive of the hideous Hunding who found her mate capriciously caught in the body of a son of Wotan. After all, demigods were not mortals, they remarked, few besides the Germans understanding Fricka's emphatic opinion on the subject.

In the second act Styr portrayed tragedy, delirium, remorse, and the mere physical weakness of woman, in a fashion that caused even herself to wonder why she had never essayed this rôle before. When she lay unconscious between the knees of Siegmund during the long duet between her lover and Brünhilde, she looked so beautiful that she continued to hold the attention of all, and Ordham *stared* at her until his gaze seemed to burn her eyelids

and she stirred uneasily. When Sieglinde was finally swept off the stage by Brünhilde, the audience, almost to a man, arose and left the house.

By this time London was "mad over her." Women whose lives were barren, great ladies whose passions were faded, men with far less reason but an equal pleasure, higher types that revelled in the brain behind the voice, the spiritual suggestion in scenes and music designed to appeal to the most elevated of mortal ideals, the remotest and shyest of the soul's desires, crowded to hear the woman who would be a valuable aid to the Almighty on the day of resurrection. Styr, exultant and happy, with the transcendent happiness of the artist in the supreme triumph of her genius, gave these splendid audiences, so difficult to please with anything more serious than the wit and paradox to which Wilde was driven not long after, the greatest that was in her, and wondered if such intoxication of the mind, such insolence of victory, could be mortal woman's a second time.

It is possible that London would have reacted in sheer exhaustion after more than five weeks of this stimulating banquet, but during that time Styr reigned unchallenged. Society, determined to meet her personally, took the shortest way round the scandals they had enjoyed, by professing not to believe them, rejecting them in toto. One ambitious hostess went so far as to announce at a large dinner party that she had taken the trouble to investigate, had even spent a small fortune cabling, and had learned that Styr had been an actress in New York of unimpeachable respectability, and that the Margaret Hill of Levering's tales was lost in a wreck on the Pacific Coast ten or twelve years since. As a matter of fact she had done nothing of the sort, but her story was cleverly put together, and she was quite aware that others besides herself but wanted an excuse to entertain the greatest artist that had visited England in their time. The Queen held out and did not invite her to sing at Windsor, for she thought it crime enough to have inspired such stories, *whether true or not*, and more than one old-fashioned


supper she steadily refused, a
ance never spoke during the a
Naturally this left her littl
went sight-seeing no more, bu
at ten he called at eleven and
he rarely saw her for a mom
same privilege, and the impr
various members of the compan
came for advice and consultatio
the company, for the impresar
Richter had his hands full with
Reckless, by this time, of goss
calculated upon a success so ov
out in the cold, Ordham fell i
her to rehearsals, and loungi
where she came to him for an
when bidden, to every receptio
fast, given in her honour, that
room with her, receive an occ
which, beggarly satisfaction a
than striding up and down his
domestic habits were sadly out
and sometimes terrified face, his
indignation, were unnecessary

kept, but he insisted that he more than any one should work for its success, as he should owe his own career to the woman who had — yes, really, he could see it now! — so subtly compelled him to study and pass those stiff exams. He pretended to believe that Mabel would have taken a house and been the first to open her doors to his friend had she been well, for it was no part of his policy to notice her mounting jealousy. He saw her so little that he was able to be as charming as ever to her, although she was looking swollen in the face and coarse, one of the pathetic punishments of woman while fulfilling the highest of her duties. After excuses failed him he simply ignored the subject — lunching and dining at home on those alternate days when Styr was obliged to seclude herself; and after a time, impatient at the still unuttered disapproval which charged the atmosphere of Grosvenor Square, he accepted other invitations. He was by no means satisfied with himself, for he was as far as ever from any desire to make his wife unhappy; but if she was so unreasonable, so undiplomatic, as to refuse him his liberty for this short period, if she was bent upon proving herself unfit to be the wife of a man of the world, let her read her lesson and profit by it. Perhaps in the depths of his mind, buried under many layers of modernism but by no means extinct, he looked upon wives from the royal point of view: sound and vigorous transits for the next edition of the race. But he was beyond analysis, and had but one desire, one purpose: to see as much of Margarethe Styr during these racing weeks as he could manage, although he made no attempt whatever to see her alone.

Mrs. Cutting, angry, frightened, outraged, not only in her maternal passion, but in those principles which she could so gracefully ignore as long as society kept its hard bright surface closed, but to which she would in the last instance have sacrificed social position itself, shut her lips in Ordham's presence, fearing to precipitate some unthinkable climax, and consoling Mabel with talk of the flying days and the singer's crowded hours.

"*He will follow* her," said Mabel one day.

"I am positive that he will do nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Cutting, briskly. "Never was a man less impetuous, less disposed to sacrifice anything for the sake of a passing flirtation."

Mabel set her lips. For the moment she looked older than her mother, so smart and fresh, so alert yet reposeful of carriage. "You have never loved, and I can tell you that love gives one more than a little joy, and pain out of all proportion; it gives terrible insights. I stirred only the youthful shallows of John Ordham. He has depths that no innocent love could reach, much less satisfy. I say nothing about brains, although God knows I am well aware how much that mind of his — it is like an octopus — reaches out for that I cannot give him. But even so, were I — well, were he my second husband, for instance, I might hold my own against even clever women."

"Mabel!" Mrs. Cutting was horrified at this sudden weed of sophistication in that fair landscape of her daughter's mind she had so carefully laid out and tended. "You have been reading too many French novels of late; I have expressed my disapproval before."

"It is a pity I did not read them earlier," said Mabel, dryly. "I should recommend a course in Balzac, Maupassant, and Bourget to all girls about to marry — Europeans, at least. To be young and fresh and beautiful and good may be sufficient if you marry a business man or a scientist, but you need a good deal more than that to keep a man of the world in the toils, particularly if he has abundant leisure. That may not be a nice fact to face, but no *congé* will dislodge it. If I were only well!"

"Mabel!"

"Don't look at me in that puritanical way!" cried Mabel, passionately. "What do you know about life? You scarcely ever saw father, and you didn't love him anyhow. Besides, Americans are not so different from these Europeans when they have time enough. I got out of Bobby the other day that father kept a mistress for years, and small blame to him. You left him deliberately year after year and you would have had no excuse for righteous

wrath had you known. But with us innocent young wives — it is a very different matter, with the world full of sirens like Margarethe Styr. And they are not all publicly branded, either. I could name a dozen that you are proud to know, that are barely gossiped about, who would take John off my hands in a moment if they had a chance at him, or he found them seductive. What has saved me so far is that he is odd, difficult to please, indolent, cold on the surface. But I can tell you that with a man like John Ordham matrimony is like American politics: the woman must know every trick of the game and be above employing none of them. It is horrible, but that makes it none the less true."

"Mabel, you are outrageous! I'll listen to no such blasphemy upon womanhood — American womanhood," she added as an afterthought. "As for your father's infidelity, it may be. I asked no questions, and I am not the fool you seem to think; but that is quite another matter from seeking to hold a man with the methods of the courtesan. Better let him go."

"Not when you love him. I'd give my immortal soul, I'd trample in the slime all the girlhood innocence — "

"Mabel! At least be careful not to excite yourself."

This admonition produced some effect; Mabel was silent for a few moments, and then resumed more calmly: "I am perfectly well aware that during the next few months I can do nothing but think and plan and try to cull wisdom from the masters that have put love under a microscope or on the dissecting table. I am sorry I have been sullen and looked as miserable as I felt. It was a mistake, as great a mistake as for us to refuse to meet Styr. We should have had her here morning, noon, and night. It is too late to alter that, and it is impossible for me to make myself charming when I look like a fright. But I am resolved to be hateful and woebegone no longer. I shall hereafter treat John exactly as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him to amuse himself while I am so dull. At least he shall not have the faintest excuse to leave me. *This is the critical time.* When that woman is far away

—and I am told she is to sing next winter in New York —and I am well again, I'll become a coquette, I'll make a fine art of matrimony; I wouldn't be too proud to take hints from the very women of the *trottoir* if I could get at them. But win and hold him I will. I am a woman, and my eyes are wide open."

"Have you considered that you may be obliged to give up your cherished plan of living in England? I am convinced by the remarks he drops now and again that he is more set upon diplomacy than ever."

"If I fail to keep him in England until he has lost his chances for the service — yes, I'll go. There is no sacrifice I won't make. I'll watch him like a cat, and know whether to hold out on that point or give in. Besides, there is always the chance of his growing impatient at the slow promotion. No doubt there will be more than one disgusted moment in which I can induce him to resign and come home to politics. Oh! Oh! that I were well and beautiful once more!"

Mrs. Cutting sighed deeply. She felt as sad as shocked. It was as if she saw a little crystal castle of surpassing beauty, every facet scintillating with a thousand modulated shades of the primal colours, shivered at her feet. Why had she been in such haste to marry her exquisite child? Mabel would have remained girlishly beautiful until twenty-eight; for ten years longer she might have gloried in her handiwork. As she did not care to listen to any more of Mabel's conclusions, she merely remarked:

"You will not look as young at forty as I do, if you let emotions shake you like this."

"I am not thinking about when I am forty. The present is all my powers are equal to. I believe John condescends to lunch at home to-day. I'll put on a red and yellow gown that may perhaps throw into the shade my own sunset tints. Oh, that I were well! That I were well!"

This was a week before Styr's departure. Ordham, whose mind was by no means obfuscated by the fever in his blood, began to notice that Mabel and her mother ceased to treat him to sour looks, subtly to make him feel

a stone and a rake. He was vaguely grateful, for, unknown to Mabel, but prompted by Mrs. Cutting, the distinguished accoucheur, at present exercising a benevolent despotism in Grosvenor Square, had given him an emphatic warning, and he dined almost regularly at home, since he could not dine alone with Styr, and strove with what grace was in him to hide his fathomless ennui and amuse Mabel.

But the strain on his powers of self-control grew more formidable daily. A short while and Styr would have vanished out of London, leaving it as empty as Sahara. The future appalled him. If he could have obtained a post, he would have forced Mabel to release him and left London at once, although he well knew how little work is demanded of an attaché. Still there would be distractions in the new scene. But there was no vacancy, would not be for several months. Upon no other pretext could he leave her — leave London, whose very hansoms would grin at him.

Not the least of the causes which contributed to the waters of his bitterness, of his agitation and disgust, was the amusement of "the world" at his patent infatuation for a famous woman who had no time to waste on men, young or old. Styr no longer encouraged him to come to the opera house during rehearsals, no longer made the slightest effort to give him an occasional moment alone. He was unable to determine whether this final act of fidelity were due to fear or to a real pleasure in meeting many of the distinguished and really important men of England; to whom, at all events, she gave her spare moments. Of coquetry he was sane enough to acquit her; he had faith in her honesty; but she could have taken no more means to fan a passion now so fully recognized that sometimes wondered grimly how much he would stake ambition when the race came off. He was able to laugh, however, at the diabolical irony of his position. Of all the men that pursued her, he alone had been given the opportunity to look ridiculous, he alone suffered, was involved *in more* than vanity. For the first time the

source of the lavish expenditures which had given Styr the greatest of her triumphs occurred to him, and he reflected that did the Cuttings and "Bobby" know the truth and were permitted to turn the pages of his mind, they might justly exult. This did not mean that he felt the least compunction or even regret, merely that he was beginning to look life more squarely in the face, give more than a lofty casual glance to cause and effect.

But he had himself well in hand. He had never been more indolent of manner, more alert in conversation. When he discovered that he was pitied as an object of hopeless passion, he ceased to be seen constantly in the wake of the prima donna, deliberately devoted himself to other women. Puppy love had pinched his face, ruined his manners, bereft him of pride and self-control; but this slow and complete awakening of his masculinity matured his character, which his brain had outstripped, and substituted the sharp violent desires of the man, the arrogance of the conquering male, for the thin timid blades of spring. To two people only did he look older, his wife and Styr. From the minds of neither was he long absent. Styr understood, and for the first time in her knowledge of him was frightened. There was something portentous in his cool smiling self-control, like that of a soft-footed tiger biding his time. Mabel half understood and was terrified but resolute. She believed that he was infatuated and unfaithful, but knew the power of the wife over the mistress if able to keep her head and wait, believed that when separated from Styr he would forget like other men. Her mind was now alert; she would be amiable and tactful, and she would stand her ground and fight to the last ditch. She was in no condition to enter upon such an engagement, and had it not been for the good streak of Dutch obstinacy in her nature, she might not have proved equal even to spurts of determination to win or die. When overcome by a physical weariness which compelled her to lie down for hours instead of pacing the room revolving plans, she could only reflect bitterly upon the disabilities which made the game so pitifully uneven. Were she well and

beautiful, she would not have hesitated to feign interest in the most notoriously "successful" of her admirers, — in royalty itself, — and bring Ordham to terms through his vanity, and, no doubt, through reawakened passion. Then she wept bitterly, not only at her present impotence but for her lost ideals. She might win back her husband, but her love for him would never again be quite free of that resentment and antagonism, even hatred, inevitable when the woman has been forced in one way or another to recognize the remorseless might of sex. Above all, she felt it to be monstrous that she, with youth and beauty and virtue, wealth and position, the fitness and the wish to be a good wife and an ornament to society, should be pitted in a death struggle with a waif from the streets, whose life had been unprintable, and who had left youth behind her. Such injustice terrified her, confused her standards. At first she prayed wildly, then she ceased to pray at all.

LV

THE WORLD AND THE CROSS

STYR and her management had been careful to give the antidote of Elsa and Elizabeth often enough to protect an exhilarated public against reaction; and by one of those curious paradoxes, known to all that have had reason to study the public taste, her portrayal of that princess among virgins, Elizabeth of Thüringen, from her joyous girlhood to that last mournful scene where she is both saint and woman and wholly lovely, was quite as popular as of those passionate and lawless heroines, Isolde and Sieglinde.

In Munich Styr had sung the part of Venus as a matter of course, leaving the more lyric rôle to the aspiring *jugendlichdramatisch*, but she, as well as her directors, well knew that to give *Tannhäuser* the mounting and accessories which made the first scene of its first act, as represented in Munich, the most suggestive on the stage, would be going a step too far even with the British public in its present state of enthusiasm. And without that rosy atmosphere like the mist of an amorous dawn, that sumptuous yet mirage-like couch in the background, the refined yet lascivious dancing of satyrs and nymphs, the visions of Leda and the swan, Europa and the bull, that first long scene, despite its delicious music, would mean to the unmusical beholder naught but an interminable duet between a forward woman in a Greek fillet and baggy gown, and a sulky man in a leathern jerkin and top-boots. Therefore was the first scene cut down to little more than a prologue, the part of Venus sung by an obese German beyond her prime, and fashion entered boxes and stalls a few moments before Elizabeth ran into the great hall of her father's castle with a burst of song as of a bird

mounting to the empyrean after long drooping behind the bars of a cage.

Perhaps Styr had never proved herself a greater actress than when she stared, incredulous and horrified, at the outbreak of the sophisticated Tannhäuser, disgusted with the provincial virtues of the knights, for she looked just sixteen; and when Mabel, who had attended the first performance, saw that dawn of sorrowful womanhood in her eyes, the impotence of maiden innocence against the subtle sweets of mature vice, she clutched her salts and nearly fainted. But when in the last act, Styr, looking as only a pure woman that has never harboured so much as a sinful thought can look, first brought tears to the eyes of old cynics by her pitiful examination of every face in the ragged procession of pilgrims returning from Rome, and then, clinging to the cross, sang her soul straight up to a waiting heaven, Mabel sniffed audibly and walked out. She could not have felt more indignant had Styr publicly been received into the bosom of the Church of Rome and advertised as a beacon light for mankind. But mental suffering had developed a species of saturnine humour in her, and when she was in bed she laughed consumedly at the fool this great actress was making of London.

Before the end of the brief season Elizabeth had won in a race long disputed, perhaps because Styr managed to convey the impression of a pure white lily growing out of a baneful swamp, in other words emphasized the sensuousness of the music, and made her audiences feel that they loved virtue the more while enjoying vicarious naughtiness none the less. Perhaps it was an unadmitted desire for vindication that caused an almost unanimous demand that *Tannhäuser* should end this agitating season. It was given, and Styr, eliminating the richness from her voice, sang with the sexless silvery sweetness of a boy chorister, which made the tremendous volume of her voice and its noble quality the more remarkable by contrast. The ovation began when the dead Elizabeth, looking like a marble angel, was carried in by the weeping pilgrims. It was too soon to *lower the curtain,* and as the audience manifested its com-

plete indifference to the lament of Heinrich, Styr was forced to rise publicly from her coffin and respond to the plaudits of her admirers. As this absurd performance smote not only her own sense of humour but that of her audience, the great Wagner season ended in a hearty burst of laughter which put everybody in the best possible temper, and made the unavoidable speech easier to make.

Pelted with bouquets and standing up to her waist in the superb floral offerings handed over the footlights, Styr thanked London for its kindness with her usual proud aloofness considerably modified, and promised to return as soon as her engagements would permit. The audience, now on its feet, shouted, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" as eagerly as children, applauded, waved their handkerchiefs, tossed their bouquets for ten minutes longer. Ordham withdrew to the depths of his box, almost paralyzed between delight at the triumph of this woman, whom he would have given the whole round globe, were it his, and an uncontrollable agitation which made him thankful he was alone in his box. He saw his hands tremble and felt the tears on his cheeks, and scorned the heroes of French romance no more.

But he made no effort to see her after she had bowed her final adieu. There was to be a great supper on the stage, but he left the opera house with a scribbled word of apology on a card to the host, and walked until he found himself, at dawn, far out in the country. He went to bed at an inn, and returned to London when the train for the Continent was halfway to the coast. He had written Styr the day before that he should make no further attempt to see her again, that he accepted her manifest decree for the present, although he was by no means certain that he should not go to Munich as soon as he was free; the less he saw of her now the better, no doubt. Then with the utmost courtesy he thanked and congratulated her. He wrote with such cold precision that Styr was as convinced as himself that he had arrived at a worldly state of mind which he meant to be irrevocable, and it was with a grinning brain that she portrayed with even more than her usual poignance a woman shattered on the merciless rocks of love.

LVI

A DIPLOMATIST OUT OF THE SADDLE

DURING the following month Ordham's large circle of acquaintances quite forgot his apparent infatuation for the Styr, so gay and debonair was he, so devoted to their society, so punctilious in his attendance upon his wife during her daily drives — "poor dear!" — so frankly and technically did he discuss the voice and histrionics of the prima donna, still a topic of conversation, so conventionally did he express his regret that he should be scribbling in the chancery of some embassy during her next visit to London. Such youthful aberrations as a young man's fancy for a fashionable singer are too common to burden the memory with, and it is not even passing strange that to-day London has as completely forgotten his devotion to the great Styr as if he had worn an invisible cap; but, for that matter, they had forgotten it far sooner than he in his raw abraded vanity suspected; for in the composite drama of which Styr, during that richly exciting and varied season, was the chief figure, few minor details stood out.

He was now so correct in his attitude of husband and son-in-law, so entertaining and amusing, that he rang hard and clear like some finely constructed machine full of little silver bells. Mrs. Cutting was charmed, but Mabel was often faint with fear. Her brain might be young and small and ignorant, but it was in a constant steel-blue glare of intuitions these days. She had been the bride of a young man comparatively candid and open despite his diplomatic temperament; she now felt herself the honoured consort of a man of unthinkable age, wearing a vizor of youth which might drop at any moment and reveal unknown

horrors, hatreds, diabolical purposes. Ordham played his part well, but he guessed that the face of the man she married was too deeply bitten into her memory for his present mask to deceive her. He did not care. He was doing his best; more could be asked of no man.

Possibly the fascination of the Ordhams of the old civilizations resides in those deep artificial layers which are the result of centuries of selection, rejection, experimentation. But deep in these organic edifications there may be more unbridled human nature than in the newer races; these, more or less conscious of a certain transparency, are, warily or intuitively, making and shaping their characters, always adapting themselves to their shifting conditions. Moreover, the man to whom leisure is but one more toy for his family lives on his practical surfaces. In men of Ordham's class practical surfaces might almost be said to be nonexistent. When thrown on their own resources and scattered over an inhospitable globe, they wring a living out of it if their natural intelligence chimes with opportunity; but they are so generally failures that it is possible Darwin saw many of them during his voyages, and they, not the lower forms, suggested the immortal phrase, "survival of the fittest." In the Ordhams, protected either by the law of primogeniture or other kindly energies of fate, those deep and multitudinous layers are not only full of charm, of delight to themselves and society, not only do they give them a sense or security which would betray itself in arrogance were they less well-bred, but, so deeply buried are such qualities as worthlessness, savagery, brutal selfishness, that only exceptional circumstances magnetize them to the surface. And even then it is only some final and terrible impetus that reveals them to their fellows in all their nakedness. No men are so protected by circumstance; in other words, by the world's — their world's — conventions.

Ordham, during these four weeks, when, as much from the instinct of noblesse oblige as pity for his young wife, whose very voice set his nerves on edge, whose every effort to please him served to remind that he was tied for life to a woman as transparent as a window-pane, was un-

able to stifle an unceasing whisper in the back of his brain that this could not last, that mortal endurance was not equal to three months more of this unnatural self-control, of a sullen defiance of desire for the woman who had made him feel as if he were a masculine Galatea and she a female Pygmalion. Had he but conceived one of those passions for her to which men are always liable, he would either have conquered it or have induced her to remain in England until tired of her. But he had given her his heart; he was filled not only with the imperious desires of the predatory male, but his brain, with pitiless logic, portrayed and reiterated every phase of the perfect union. Two powerful correlated personalities had met, and each was the helpless victim of the other.

It was still incomprehensible to him that he could fail to obtain anything he craved, much less what was beginning to seem of more value to him than life. "More than life," indeed, was but a phrase; in his case, "more than career" represented the alternative. The forecasting of a blighting scandal held him in leash as effectively as his sense of duty to the girl he had married; married, when all was said, with his eyes open, for, whether deceived or not in the woman, he knew that he was yielding his liberty and had not hesitated a moment.

But specious arguments were not wanting half to convince him that both he and Styr were clever enough to blind the world until truth had escaped in such vagrant jets that people would have accepted the situation almost before they knew it existed. Mabel, he was now convinced, would never get a divorce, and the busy world, unless slapped in the face, is very lenient to the bearer of a great name, the dispenser of large hospitalities, and the owner of rare gifts. Nevertheless, Ordham was able to consider the possible reverse of the picture and to be thankful that circumstances kept him for the present in England. He half hoped that by the time he was free his worldly sense would wholly have conquered the primitive force of this newly realized passion, or that the latter would sink under his natural indolence and taste for procrastination. Indeed

he had almost concluded that, intolerable as the strain was, he should emerge triumphant, when he met his mother entering the house in Grosvenor Square one afternoon as he was about to leave it. She told him that she had just received a telegram from Bridgminster's servant stating that his master believed himself about to die and had expressed a wish to see her. All that had been consigned to the deepest pit in Ordham's mind during the last few days rose instantly and quite calmly to the surface. He did not even hesitate.

"Insist that I go with you," he said, turning to go upstairs with her. "Insist that you are not able to stand the ordeal alone."

"But, Johnny—"

"I am going to ring for Hines to pack. Of course you start at once. When I join you in the family circle, I hope you will have impressed them with the fact that you cannot go without me."

She recalled—perhaps it was his cool steady gaze above the sudden pallor of his face that evoked the memory—that however she may have managed this son of hers, she had never governed him; shrugging her shoulders, she went up to inform Mrs. Cutting and Mabel as volubly as a French woman of her terrible upset over the telegram, and her insistence to Johnny, whom she had providentially met as he was leaving the house, that he should go with her.

He had changed his clothes for a travelling suit and was giving his final directions to the distracted Hines when there was a tap at his door. He opened it himself, and seeing his mother-in-law, stepped out and closed it behind him. Mrs. Cutting's face was pale and there was fear in her eyes.

"You are not really going!" she exclaimed.

"Has not my mother explained?"

"Your mother can take Stanley with her. It is not possible that you will leave Mabel now—when—almost any minute—"

"Oh, I shall be gone but a few days. Surely—"

"Mabel, poor child, is persuading herself that you ought

to go, but she overrates her power of endurance. I know — I *know* — that after you are gone there will be a reaction — she will break down. I would not answer for the consequences."

Ordham sighed. He was hardly aware of the woman's presence, save in so far as she forced him to talk when he would have preferred not to open his mouth for twenty-four hours. "Surely you and the doctor — "

"Of course you know practically nothing about such things." Mrs. Cutting actually blushed; woman of society as she was, she would be a prude until the end. "But it is dangerous to agitate — "

"Why in heaven's name should she be agitated because I absent myself for a few days? It has struck me that she grows more sensible every day."

"Oh, men! I repeat that I am convinced that she will break down as soon as she realizes that she cannot see you constantly, — that you have actually deserted her at a time like this!"

"Deserted! Dear Mrs. Cutting, is not that rather a strong word? I shall not be gone more than a week at most."

"A week! Oh, how shall I make you understand?"

"Perhaps it is because there is really nothing to make clear. You are agitating yourself for nothing." There was no nervousness, no abstraction, even, in his manner. He smiled into her eyes and stood quite at his ease, with all that blend of charm and formality that had won her approval the day she met him in Princess Nachmeister's park. A memory struggled upward in her mind. It was ghostly, evasive; then it took form. She recalled that fleeting moment in which she had responded to the cool ruthless kernel of this young man, so elaborately endowed for public service. Her own ambitions might be dust before the week was out, but he — he would survive more than the knowledge that he had been the death of his young wife. She shook from head to foot in the first real terror and agitation she had ever known.

"You will kill her," she stammered. "If there should be *any complication* — "

He ceased to smile and, taking her hand, drew it through his arm and led her to the door of her own room. "You know that no girl could be stronger than Mabel," he said soothingly, and in so impersonal a manner that Mrs. Cutting felt as if the blood in her veins were freezing. "And there is nothing in the world as natural as this sort of thing. Think of the thousands of women that bring their children into the world, every month in the year, who are in every sort of trouble; from the Brittany women, whose husbands have gone on the *grand pêche*, and are more likely than not to return no more, to the poor creatures in Whitechapel, beaten and kicked up to the last minute. Women were made to bring children into the world and to survive far worse ordeals than a separation of a few days from their devoted husbands. What on earth could I do if I were here? It seems to me, for that matter, rather nicer that I should not be."

"Mabel is not inured to suffering like those women," Mrs. Cutting began, but Ordham opened her door and gently pushed her in. He went on to the drawing-room. Mabel, although perhaps a shade sallower than common, was quite alert and cheerful. He understood her tactics, but if the time was past when she could deceive him in any way, he was not only grateful to her now but moved to admiration; for after all she was very young. No doubt in time she would make a clever woman of sorts. And although he believed his mother-in-law's fears to be sheer nonsense, he was quite aware that Mabel (like all women, of course!) would fancy herself unhappy during his absence.

"It is too dreadful to think that I must part with you, even for a few days," she said brightly. "You keep me up so! But of course if Lady Pat feels that you are necessary, I gracefully yield. But do make it as short as possible. You will, won't you?"

"Of course!" He stooped and kissed her with more warmth than usual. "Lady Pat is quite right. I don't fancy Bridg will make a pathetic death-bed scene and try *her* nerves; that is not in his line; but there may be other

details — she is quite right. For the matter of that, this may be but a false alarm — in any case we need not be away too long."

"No, indeed!" Lady Bridgminster rose. "I shall return in less than a week. But go I must, and Johnny owes me a filial duty once in a while. Has your four-wheeler come? Mine was to follow me here."

"I am quite ready."

They drove to Paddington station, followed by two four-wheelers with luggage atop and servant within. "What is your game, Johnny?" asked Lady Bridgminster, with lively curiosity. "Why inflict yourself with Bridg if you had to take a holiday? No doubt Mabel, who is a model wife, if she is a fright at present, would have given you a few days at Ordham. You never wanted for excuses."

"I had no intention until you came in of making any excuse."

"But why Bridg? I doubt if he will be glad to see you."

"That is not of the slightest consequence."

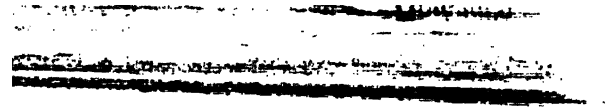
Her curiosity was not relieved until she was in her reserved compartment, and the maid, having arranged her pillows, had gone to her second-class carriage. Then Ordham closed the door and shook hands through the window with his mother.

"Good-by for the present," he said. "I have just time to catch my train at Victoria."

"John Ordham!"

"If you write to Mabel or her mother, you might comment upon my hatred of letter writing. I am going to the Continent and shall remain away exactly a week. If I think best, I shall write or telegraph Mabel from there, but it hardly matters. I shall have returned before she will have had time to think much about it."

Lady Bridgminster was given no opportunity to remonstrate, for he walked swiftly to his waiting hansom and drove off. But considering that she was a lady too philosophical to cut wrinkles in her complexion by worrying *over the inevitable*, she looked almost blanched and



LVII

THE LAST CARD

ORDHAM, having felt himself expelled from those orderly conditions in which so many men dwell for a lifetime with only an occasional abortive protest, shot out by the dynamic power of angry human forces too long accumulating, had no mind to indulge in futile regrets. He did not pretend to assert that his will was too weak to continue its inhibitions had he chosen, but he had suddenly realized that he did not choose, and that was the end of it. Accordingly, he banished the very memory of Mabel, declared war on menacing fingers shaking over the ramparts still erect to protect his future, and untormented for the first time in many weeks, inveigled sleep the moment his head touched the pillow of his berth. The passage was quiet and he slept until the boat reached Flushing. He slept again in the train, and, upon being informed in Cologne that the Munich express was an hour late, he sensibly went to a hotel and took a bath. The rest of the journey seemed interminable. It was the season for tourists, the dust and heat were insufferable. But as the train ambled into the great dépôt of Munich, he forgot discomforts, and, all his being quivering, he suddenly felt that this beautiful city of beautiful memories would give him back his youth; he had even a whimsical idea that he had left it there and she was holding it for him intact; he had but to ask for it.

He sprang from the carriage almost before the train halted, and without waiting for Hines to do all the work walked rapidly up the platform to secure a cab. I *actually had his* ticket ready as he passed through

gate, instead of keeping the mob cursing behind him after his usual fashion. His head was in the air, he saw no one in the waiting crowd, until he almost ran over a tall footman who planted himself directly in his path.

"Sir," began this person. "I beg your pardon —" He almost fell back, for the eyes he encountered were like those of a wild beast at bay. Ordham had recognized the man at once as one of the servants of the British Legation, and for the first time in his life was possessed with the lust to slay. But he recovered himself instantly, and although he felt as if the sudden fire in his veins were falling to ashes with youth and hope and life itself, he asked the man calmly enough what he wanted.

"Mr. Trowbridge sent three of us, sir, to stand at different points. Six telegrams have come for you to-day. Thomas has them. He is outside by the cabs, sir."

Ordham followed the man, half resolving to tear up the telegrams and scatter them over the stones of Munich. There was neither pity nor sympathy in him. He felt pure flint, and had he been suddenly translated into Mabel's presence, she would have been welcome to the discovery that he hated her. But, automatically, noblesse oblige did its work. When the telegrams were handed to him, he arranged them methodically in the order of their dates, and read them through. From them he learned that Mabel's self-control had deserted her even in the moment of his departure. She had sent a servant to follow his cab and had discovered that he had taken the train for the Continent. She had governed her agitation in a degree until her suspicions were confirmed, but it then had become uncontrollable, and a somewhat premature confinement was the result. Then he read that the child was dead, and that, her excitement resisting all attempts to alleviate it, there was practically no question of her death unless she could be assured that he would return at once. In the final telegram Mrs. Cutting humbled herself to the dust. The doctor also had telegraphed.

Ordham, still acting under the compulsion of that little *engine* which civilization has attached to the modern brain,

and which so often, automatically, gets up steam and keeps the track no matter how palsied the hand or blinding the mists, turned to Hines and told him to send a telegram to London and reserve a compartment for the train that left at eleven o'clock. Then he went to a hotel and took another bath and changed his linen, almost grateful to the grime of the hot and dusty day which forced him to observe these commonplace formalities. Resolving to walk to Schwabing, as much to settle his nerves as to avoid Styr's supper hour, he left his hotel, which was in the Dinerstrasse, and strolled along endeavouring to adjust himself to the present. He had enough to agitate him, aside from the fact that he must leave Munich that night. As Styr had not sent him a line since her departure, he was convinced that her frame of mind had been no more enviable than his. He had subscribed for the principal daily newspapers of Munich and knew that she had, as ever, compelled the admiration of those critics not in league with the cabal; but since the first of July the opera house had been closed and he could appreciate how the sudden idleness must afflict her. He was not even sure that she was in Munich. She might already have gone on a *Gastspiel*. If that were the case, he must wait another month at least — he wondered if he should!

He sauntered along, pausing deliberately to look at the beautiful opera house, a wing of the Residenz, but dominating the square before it with its noble proportions, its brilliant blue and gold fresco of Apollo among the Muses above the portico. His heart beat thickly, and not alone for Margarethe Styr. How many times had his cab passed the mounted guard, rolled up the steep incline to the entrance where he was ever obsequiously received by the tall doorkeeper in livery (with his palm out) — and then the wide lobby full of late comers, the crush at the *garde robes*, the big chief of all the important little officials, in his gorgeous white and blue uniform, his cocked hat and mace, the gay foyer, and then, and then, — he came to the present abruptly. He wondered at the fluid-

ity of youth that lingered in him, and walked more quickly down Perusastrasse.

He saw that the narrow pavements of Theatinerstrasse were crowded, as was usual at this hour, many, indeed, walking in the street itself. From five to seven was the fashionable hour for shopping and displaying one's best frocks, and although most of the smart people were away, many remained in that salubrious city the year round, save for brief visits to Italy or neighbouring points of interest. He, too, had been accustomed to stroll in Theatinerstrasse at this hour, and he approached it with some eagerness, hoping that it would banish the present for another moment. But as he reached the corner he came to an abrupt halt and nearly lost his breath. Sailing toward him, her plump figure sheathed and swaddled in crêpe, her head, nay her nose, in the air, her crêpe veil trailing on the pavement behind her, handsome, insolent, radiant, was Frau von Wass. Ordham fled into the English drug-store, and even although he could not be sure that he had escaped the manubial eye of a lady who looked more bent upon game and conquest than ever before, — refreshed, rejuvenated, and hungry, after her long seclusion, — he could not, at a safe distance, resist staring through the glass of the door. But Frau Hélène had not seen him. She crossed Theatinerstrasse, not deigning to lift the train of skirt or veil, and entered a milliner's shop. Ordham hastily retreated up Perusastrasse, and took a cab at the post-office. He had no desire to meet and exchange words with any chance acquaintance, however harmless, and as the cab sauntered up the Ludwigstrasse he kept his eyes averted from the pavements and reflected upon the banalities of life, its merciless anti-climaxes. Apparently there was no such thing as pure tragedy.

He looked at his watch. It was but seven o'clock, Styr's supper hour. He told the *kutscher* to drive in the Englischergarten. Half an hour's further respite — he was not averse! He felt dull, hard, nervous. His head was hot, his hands cold. In the deserted driveway of the park he took off his hat and leaned back with closed

eyes. But the telegrams in his pocket did not burn him; his mind was on the approaching interview. He was quite aware that if Styr were in the villa the next hour would be far more portentous than that of his marriage, and although it never occurred to him to turn back, he faltered a bit.

But at half-past seven he presented himself at the gate of the villa. Old Kurt answered his ring and kissed his hand effusively. When told that the Frau Gräfin was in the gallery, Ordham motioned the man aside and went rapidly down the hall and opened the door. As he saw the familiar room in the lamplight, with Styr seated at the farther end before a table, writing, his head swam, and he hardly noticed that she almost stumbled to her feet and stood staring at him.

But all she said was, "Oh!"

He cast his hat on one chair, his gloves on another, almost revolved on his heel, and then went slowly forward. But she held a cold hand across the table and motioned him to a chair. "Sit down — please. You might have telegraphed."

She almost fell into her own chair, and he saw that her face was thin, her skin dull, her eyes in dark orbits. He had never seen her look less handsome or more alluring. But he took the chair, as she desired it. He had known that many things must be said before the last barrier went down, that she would never rush into his arms even if taken by surprise. But he was far from guessing the new barrier she had been educating her courage to erect in case he came, although she had no mind for it save as a last resource.

She realized, however, that it would be a waste of time to beat about the bush, and said, "I fancied that you would either come within a month or two or not at all." She spoke coldly, while they eyed each other like enemies, but he observed that her breath was short.

"I came on a sudden impulse, having quite made up my mind to wait until Mabel was well again. I must return — *very shortly*. I arranged matters so that she

would think I had gone north with my mother. But although I mechanically took every precaution to spare her, no doubt I should have come if I had been obliged to walk over her dead body."

"What have you come for?"

"To claim you. To bind you to me forever. I have no longer the least intention of attempting to live without you. Some way it must be arranged."

"It cannot be arranged."

"It shall be."

"Do you remember the promise you made me on Stanmore Heath?"

"I remember every word that has passed between us."

"You cannot have me and your career too."

"I shall make the attempt. If I fail, the career will have to go."

"Do you hope for satiety before the end of the period during which a love affair may, with due precautions, be kept secret — "

"No!" he said violently. "I neither hope nor wish for anything of the sort. If I could have put you out of my mind, as I have always been able to banish other memories, I am free to confess that I should have done so. But I could as easily cease to breathe, and live. I refuse to contemplate life without you, and have come here sooner than I intended, because I cannot — will not — wait any longer to enter upon a complete understanding with you. It took me a long time to wake up; I hesitated longer than many men would have done. I am almost ashamed that I hesitated at all. It makes me seem to myself a monster of calculation. But you stood me off in the first place, and in the second, — well, aside from my career, I recognized that I had voluntarily assumed responsibilities that must bind me to a certain extent. With those I shall compromise as far as possible, but my career, I fancy, will take care of itself. If you have useful gifts and are willing to exercise them, life is only too ready to wring the last drop of blood out of your brain."

"And do you fancy," she cried harshly, "that I shall

renounce my own career in order to follow you about and hide in back streets to be always at your beck and call? The egoism of man passes comprehension!"

But he neither coloured nor turned pale. He looked at her steadily. "Of course I expect you to do nothing of the sort. As I am not, thanks to my stupidity, in a position to marry you, as we are both too proud and ambitious deliberately to renounce the world after the fashion of those that have nothing worth speaking of to sacrifice, and as a possibly long life on this planet apart is unthinkable, we must resort to compromise. Europe is a small place and I shall see that I am not sent out of it. We can meet constantly. An attaché has little to do — it will be several years before I shall be anything more. I have much influence, I can obtain many leaves of absence. You can *gast* where I am accredited. I understand that I am to go to Paris. It is not a day's journey from Munich. You could spend at least one week in every month there, and no one would think of asking what took a prima donna to Paris — any woman, for that matter!"

"And my New York season?"

"I hope you will go to New York only once. Three months will be an eternity, but I should be the last to deprive you of that supreme triumph. I wish it were over — but — well, there will be the long summers which we shall manage to spend together somewhere."

"We should be the scandal of Europe in six months. Lord Bridgminster will not live long. Your inheritance will make you more conspicuous than ever. All the bishops in England would be writing to the *Times* protesting against your employment by a virtuous government. A love affair here, and every servant in Munich would know it. In great cities I should be watched by more than servants. American correspondents would sit on my doorstep. Your wife —"

"My wife, when she is well, will, in any case, learn that I shall never live with her again. She will also learn that to criticise any act of mine would be as great an impertinence as if she were one of my relations. She will have

everything else that she married me for. In time she must cease to care for a man that will have none of her."

"Poor thing!" The pity was involuntary and sincere. "How she will suffer!"

"Who does not suffer? Let her be thankful that she is made of thistle-down that any strong wind may blow about, but only from one pleasant place to another."

"Thistle-down has been known to scatter in winds too strong. You might kill her."

"The fit survive."

"Oh, you are hard! You are man epitomized."

"I have put a temporary lid on a devil's brew. Who has not iron and steel in his nature if he amounts to anything? It comes out in one fashion and another. I am showing you my naked soul. I shall never do that to the child I married — to any one else on earth, for that matter. Mabel will be let down as easily as possible. I have every wish to spare her, and she gains in acuteness. Possibly she will let me alone at first in the hope of slowly winning me back, and meanwhile learn to do without me."

"You should not have left her now. There is always the possibility of death in childbirth."

She saw him turn a shade paler and stir uneasily, but his gaze did not soften nor waver. She said abruptly:

"How can you tell that were you suddenly free, I should not expect you to marry me?"

"I should certainly marry you."

"And what compromise then? Not a woman in diplomatic society would receive me. I can see them! To shake hands with a famous artist at a reception and go away and talk about it is one thing; to receive her as an equal, to forget her scandalous history as well as her public career — why discuss the obvious? Even were I willing to renounce my career, you never could stand the position. Loyalty to me and your own pride would force you to give up the service."

"Not now. You forget your conquest of London; its conclusion to believe none of those stories."

"London felt quite safe in permitting itself to be capti-

vated by the celebrity of the moment; I asked nothing further of it, encouraged none of its marriageable men, my stay was brief. If I invaded one of those Londons *in petto*, a British embassy, demanding to be received as an equal, do you believe that they would guilelessly accept me? They would immediately investigate and learn the truth."

"Anything can be lived down —"

"Not a past like mine."

"I don't believe that there would be any investigation, if only because London first believed those outrageous stories of Levering's, and then reacted from them. He overreached himself —"

"Levering was extraordinarily moderate. No doubt it would be as you say, as long as I remained a mere prima donna, for people are only too anxious there should be no obstacle between their conscience and the pleasure of lionizing: but the moment I gave up the stage, married one of their own — I should be stoned out of the gates and you with me."

Ordham sprang to his feet, overturning his chair. "Enough of improbabilities. Mabel has no intention of dying. We have only the present to consider and we have wasted too many words already. You and I exist in a void. We have been driven straight toward each other for the last fourteen months. As well try to escape the morrow's sun —"

She too had risen and pushed back her chair, but she kept the table between them. Her face flushed almost black, then turned so white that he thought her about to faint. But something in her eyes arrested him. He held his breath. Once more he almost turned on his heel.

"Then listen to the whole story," she cried, with that hoarse muddle of accents that banished the very memory of her gift of song. "God! how am I to say it all? And is it for your sake alone? I wonder? I have vowed to save you from yourself, give you to public life; but I doubt if I could bring myself to rip the grave-clothes and show *the corpse, if my own career were not so dear to me,*

the delight in song, in art, in holding great publics spell-bound, in reigning a queen of sorts — and a singer's time is brief enough! I have asked — oh, many times — whether I loved you or my art most, and the answer has not always been the same, not by any means. I don't know! I don't know!

"But not for a moment do I believe that we could compromise with the world as you have arranged in your royal manner. It would mean that one of us would have to go into obscurity, be forgotten by the world, and that would be my part. You would never give way, and I should hate you if you did. Good God! Do you think I have thought of anything else since my return to Munich? I have been tempted to scald my flesh to relieve the torments of my mind. And I tell you there is no way out, there is nothing for us in this life but what we have had already, nothing! We must part, and part to-night, before it is too late, and as there is no other way to bring you to your senses, I shall tell you that hideous history, not only to blast your love out of existence, but to inspire you with a vision of the enthusiasm with which London would receive me as a peeress, should you ever be free."

She hurried on as if she feared he might protest, or her own courage ebb. "I have told you that I was bred in a coal-mining district, where I never saw a clean face, where I do not recall a fugitive instinct for cleanliness in myself, where human beings were merely brutes that walked on two legs instead of four. We threw our dead out into the snow to lie there until the ground thawed — until a reporter chanced along, wrote a sensational story for his newspaper, and put our overseer to shame. I did not know the alphabet; perhaps I did not know there was such a thing — I forget.

"I was not fifteen when a drummer came to the hamlet, an alert flashy young man. I think I told you that I wore hopsacking — if your imagination can picture that material. But in spite of hopsacking, in spite of a dirty face, the man saw the promise of beauty, and to do the creature justice he thought me several years older than I was, for

I was already very tall. He made no impression upon me whatever during that visit, but on his return some months later he brought me candy, ribbons, many small trinkets which I could hide, and promised me unlimited silk and diamonds if I would go with him. The men of the district had not been unkind to me, except that I was made to do double the usual woman's work on account of my physique and strength; the father of the family I lived with had no doubt given me the benefit of his protection, as I was able to earn almost as much as a boy. As for myself, I was always too busy or too tired to get into mischief. I do not fancy that the silks and jewels would have tempted me particularly, for I had never seen any, and he had some trouble making his meaning clear. But when he promised me a life of ease, a comfortable home, and a servant, I did not hesitate a moment. I stole off one night and met him at a flag station where he gave me a suit of decent clothes to put on, and the train came along half an hour later. He took me to New York. I ran away from him three times in the first month. I not only hated him, but I was made to do all the work in his dingy little flat. But the streets terrified me and I went back to him. I lived with him a year, and he was often away. During that year I learned many things. I saw children going to school and knew what it meant, for he had amused himself teaching me to read and write. I saw the outside of luxury and pleasure. He gave me good sensible clothes and took me to the theatre, where we sat in the gallery and gazed down upon a bewildering world of wealth and fashion. All the women looked to me like goddesses or angels. So did the actresses!

"The days were very long. No one in the big cheap apartment house ever spoke to me, and one day the janitress slapped me for spilling milk in the entrance and called me a name one does not forget. My man was coarse and violent. I hated him increasingly. There was but one way of escape. I had often been out with him late at night. I went out one night alone. By this time I was conscious of my looks, and from some remote recess in my slowly

awakening brain the instinct for dress had crept forth. I did not return to the flat. I lived the life of the streets with complete unconcern until I finally picked up an easy-going man of middle age with a leaning toward benevolence, whom I asked to educate me, and who consented, much pleased with the element of variety thus introduced into a somewhat humdrum existence. He put me in a little flat not far from his own modest brownstone mansion, found me a respectable-looking harridan to act as chaperon and sent me to a school as his ward. I disliked him as much as my original protector, but I tolerated him until I was eighteen, and as well educated as the ordinary girl of a year or two younger. By this time he had fallen into the habit of bringing men to the flat to dinner. He was proud of his discovery, I was pert and sharp and bad-tempered, and amused him and his friends. These evenings were not very hilarious, but they must have been an immense relief to the respectable man with a sneaking blackguard in him — a common enough type — after the dull order of his family circle. They were not even fashionable; he was a merchant of some standing and a fair income, but far from being a high liver in any way.

"He looked upon me as a child, a bright waif who naturally desired to educate herself against the time when beauty should have fled, and she might aspire to some means of support above service. I made my deliberate choice of the youngest and least ill-favoured of his friends, a bachelor with a gay temper and good manners. That was my first exercise of the art of fascination. Heretofore, hardly dreaming of anything higher, I had been a mere creature of commerce. I vanquished him in a week, and transferred my belongings to another retreat. I liked this man well enough. He surrounded me with luxuries, provided me with private teachers, and gave me a liberal allowance.

"A year passed. I was bursting with life, with the desire to live. I was sick of being hidden away. My intellect forged steadily ahead in its persistent cravings, but other cravings kept pace. I wanted gayety, society, brill-

iancy. I wanted admiration. This man brought no other men to my apartment, took me nowhere. I fancied him in love with me and asked him to marry me. I shall never forget the expression of his face. I left him for a man who had followed me about for some time. He was what is loosely known as a man about town, with no affiliations, nothing to lose, only too delighted to spend money on a pretty woman and show her off. I drank the cup of pleasure daily. I met other women of the same sort, turned night into day, revelled in gorgeous raiment, choice food, fine wines, and a reasonable number of jewels. The man was coarse, but good-natured and generous.

"Long before this I had begun to read — literature. I now knew exactly what I was about, what I was. But the only effect of thought was to create a disgust for the particular form of vice in which I lived. Its vulgarity, its obviousness, became hateful to me. Meanwhile I had met, now and again, men of a far higher social caste, of education, polish. There was no question in my mind that my preference for men of this sort was pronounced, but to live with any one of them meant being hidden away again, and for this I had no taste. I dreaded the ennui, and I loved excitement, although I wanted it in the society of gentlemen. Suddenly I conceived the idea of going on the stage. This would give me a *raison d'être*, as well as a measure of independence. I did so, and soon transferred myself to a man of fashion and wealth, and a wife who was one of the handsomest, and, to judge by appearances, one of the sweetest women in New York society. I found him rather a brute, selfish, capricious, and extraordinarily mean. But I made a desperate effort to love this man, for by this time my mating instinct had developed and I wanted to love. I might as well have tried to love a brownstone front. I left him for another man of his class, and this man I did love. I tried to kill him. I once told you. For a time I forswore all men. I sold my jewels and went to Europe. But everywhere some man recognized me, and I found that I could make no friends save books, and I was *too young for* those to suffice. I returned to New York

with a friend of the two last men that had protected me. I became quite reckless; and as by this time I was extraordinarily handsome, in a vital splendid way, and with something like genius in the matter of dress, I was more sought after among fast men than any woman of my class. I tormented many men to whom I yielded nothing. That was my revenge.

"Still I read and studied. I had not an illusion about myself. I did not pretend to excuse myself. I made money in stocks. I could have lived alone with my books. But I alternately hated and loved the excitement, the luxury, the senseless extravagance in which I indulged whenever I found a man weak enough to squander his all upon me. At that time I had but a glimmer of a belief in my histrionic talent, and even had I believed in it and been consumed with ambition, I should have met with but one reply from every manager — I was too tall. True, I might have got some man to put up the money for a starring tour and acted Lady Macbeth or some other classic rôle, but I knew that to succeed I must have practice first, and this I could not get. I was condemned to small parts in the background, and often would have lost my position altogether but for influence. Moreover, curiously enough, I avoided the notice of the public as much as possible. I kept out of the newspapers.

"I had no suspicion that anything could be made of my voice until I had lived this sort of life for some ten years. Meanwhile, as I told you, I had fits of horrible disgust, intolerable ennui. All societies save those peopled with the fast and frivolous were closed to me. Such unspeakably frivolous women! Many of them, too, were ladies born, but *déclassée*.

"I shut myself up once or twice again with my books, but I always went back. Life without men was no life at all. My brain seemed to be cut in half with a straight line of cleavage. One-half might contain something like a real intellect, inherited, — well, that is of no consequence, — the other was that of the courtesan pure and simple.

"Sometimes the intellectual side went to sleep altogether,

especially when the men I happened to know were more interesting than commonly. Men, as a whole, are not very interesting. In the abstract, perhaps, but not to their wives or mistresses. But I was a woman of splendid lustiness, of insolent determination to cram youth to the lid with all that life offered to outcasts like myself. Circumstances had made me a waif. I would make the best of it. Several times good women came and tried to reclaim me. I argued them out of the house. What had they to offer in exchange? Would they receive me in their set, find me a husband, obliterate my reputation? One, I remember, had a sense of humour, and confessed that plain uncompanioned virtue would seem somewhat barren to herself after the luxury and beauty, the society of clever men, which at that moment I enjoyed: as a rule fast men have no taste for clever men, and they are themselves dull beyond all power of words to describe; but at this time I was protected by and half loved a Western millionnaire with a weakness for the arts and a desire to play the patron; which I encouraged. But he was shot— To return to the lady who would have reclaimed me; she added astutely that I had better take the cue from the wise prime donne and retire of my own accord. And she added, as she left the house, 'There is always Europe, you know. And you have a brain.'

"But I had been to Europe; alone and companioned. It was soon after this that I ceased to blow hot and cold. By imperceptible degrees I came wholly to hate my life, to loathe it, to grow sick, sick, sick of men. Compositely they were brutes, the best of them. Life with such women, no doubt, brings out the worst in them. Perhaps their wives should thank us. Man in mental and spiritual undress are as disillusionizing as a certain President of the United States must have been to his household when hanging over the banisters of the White House in his red flannels and shouting for hot water.

"But I had lost the money I had made, for I had the stock-gambling fever. I thought of suicide more than *once, for I not* only knew of no way in which I could sup-

port myself decently, but I dreaded solitude, ennui. Suddenly I discovered my voice. That interested me for a time, although I had no idea it would ever be of any use to me. But my old teacher was enthusiastic and often inspired me with ambitious dreams, for he dangled Bayreuth before me, and at times I believed that he knew what he was talking about; at others it seemed too much like a fairy story, and I despaired.

"I made money again, this time a considerable sum, and I determined to gamble no more. I had a good friend in a banker whom I could trust, and he invested my money. I went West with that travelling company in order to break with my old connection. In time I should return and devote myself to music, even if I never went on the operatic stage. My musical tastes had been developed for several years, and at least I could live in some German or Italian city and study and enjoy music, no doubt find companionship in the society of artists.

"Then came the wreck. You know the rest. Whether you now know all, whether your imagination has carried you into all the dark corners, into every chamber of horrors — I can tell you the story in outline, but the details are beyond my strength — I do not know. I hope so. I can only reiterate that I have lived with more men than I pretend to remember, whose very names would be unfamiliar should I hear them; that for years I lived this life with my intelligence wide awake, — for I never drank, never took a drug in my life, — my literary tastes of the best, my refinement of mind growing daily; that when I finally abandoned this existence it was from no desire for reform, to be a good woman; it was without one atom of remorse. It was simply and only because I hated men, because that wreck gave me the unique opportunity to begin life over again, and my voice pointed the way. I have squeezed my character dry of the woman I was in those days — she is like an old book; I have hardly thought about her until lately. I do not even now, in this minute, think upon that time with regret. It is simply not

in me to worry over what is past and done; nor could I appreciate the beauty of life as I do: no good woman has the profound appreciations that I have. But I recognize the justice of the retribution. The first departure from principles, or shall I say the social code, that I never had heard of, was inevitable. So were the next two or three years. Had I then broken away, gone to some other city before I became conspicuous, and supported myself respectably, as, with my varied cleverness, I could have done, no doubt you would forgive me that childish misstep and love me the more. Nor could that brief past ever be raked up; at all events it would be next to impossible. But I persisted in that life for thirteen years: until I was bored and satiated, until something more satisfactory offered. Were I penitent now, I might inspire your sympathy, be worthy of it; but I would not give up one of those years of misery, of vice, of horrors, if I believed that — as I do — they played their part with the coincidently progressing brain in developing that depth and intensity of genius which makes me the greatest Isolde the world will ever see. I regret nothing — nothing! And for that reason I hold myself to be the worst woman alive, and am prepared to see you turn your back and walk out without comment. I shall not ask you to stay!"

Her voice had not faltered for a moment; she had spoken with an increasing rapidity of utterance. But suddenly she broke off short, looked helplessly at Ordham, her face, which had looked flushed and full as she spoke, becoming white and pinched once more, the defiant glare dying out of her eyes. He had stood motionless during the horrid sordid story, looking straight at her, his face almost vacant, as if his brain had emptied itself of every thought, that it might receive to the brim all she chose to pour into it. So she had seen him many times at a new or absorbing play. He merely looked paler, his eyes darker. She stopped, held her breath, then:

"Well?" she stammered. "Well?"—

The colour came back to his face, and with it an intense deepening of expression. He drew out his watch,

then took the six telegrams from his pocket and laid them on the table between them.

"I am sorry you chose to-night to tell me that story," he said, in his ordinary tones, "for, as you will see by reading these telegrams, I must take the eleven o'clock express, and it is now quarter past ten. Hines is no doubt at the door — "

But she interrupted him with a cry that was almost a scream. "Good God! Do you mean to say that it makes no difference? What are you made of?"

"It might have made a difference a year ago. Now it makes none whatever — or — yes — it is odd you should not have guessed that the more you made me pity you the more I should love you. And then — I had imagined very much all you have told me, taken it for granted, at least. Perhaps it is just as well, after all, that you selected to-night for the tale, if I had to hear it, for although determined to come to an understanding with you, I was in no humour for love-making. We have now wiped the thing off the slate, and, if you don't mind, when I return we will not refer to it."

She glanced at the telegrams, dropped into a chair, and covered her face with her shaking hands. "Your wife will die," she moaned, "your wife will die!"

"I have not the least idea she will die. She is as strong as you are. I dare not assume that these telegrams were sent merely to frighten me and bring me back; no doubt excitement has made her ill, and in that case there may be danger. Besides, she has lost her child. I shall go, of course. But I shall return at the earliest possible moment. We will then make our plans as deliberately as more fortunate people do when about to marry. I am capable of being faithful to one woman for a lifetime, and I shall be faithful to you. We can be unimaginably happy. But I must not miss the train."

He went round the table, and she stood up, shaking. "Not to-night!" she said. "I cannot kiss you so soon after that story. It has brought the past too close."

"Very well." He took both her hands, however, and *bending* his face looked close into her eyes.

"Swear to me that you will be here when I return," he said.

"Yes, I shall be here."

His eyes contracted at some hint of irony in her voice, and his grip on her hands intensified.

"If I thought that you would make way with yourself, I should not leave you. Unless you swear that you will do nothing so foolish and so cruel, I shall not return to England, and in that case I may have my wife's death on my head."

She returned his intense gaze for a moment, then, wrenching her hands away, pushed him from her violently. "Do not worry!" she cried harshly. "If I kill myself, I'll take you with me. I am not Isolde for nothing. But now, for God's sake, go! I want to be alone."

nurse, and Mrs. Cutting, were waiting on the threshold. He went hastily to his own room, and as he closed the door he felt something at his heels. It was LaLa, and he took him in his arms and sat without moving, almost without thought, for an hour. At the end of that time there was a tap and he admitted Mrs. Cutting. As he saw her face he braced himself and all sense of unreality left him. Her cherished but never harnessed youth had deserted her. Her face was pinched and yellow and old. Her hair was streaked with white. Her lips were gray and shaking. But even in her deep maternal grief, in the one violent blow that life had dealt her, even in her new hatred of this royal child of fortune, she was unable to undam her soul and overwhelm him with a fury of scorn and hatred, as she had dimly imagined she should do when she left Mabel's room for his. She could suffer, but not for her were the great tragic emotions, the splendours, the lightning blasts of expression. As she disciplined her relaxed mouth and pressed her hand hard against her bosom, Ordham's mind vagrantly recalled an observation of Styr's regarding the best of the American actors: that they managed to convey the impression of deep intense emotion, artistically repressed; when as a matter of fact they had nothing to repress. But that the poor woman suffered to the full capacity of her meagre nature he could not doubt, and he tried to take her hand and lead her to a chair. But she, like her daughter, thrust him away.

"Mabel is dead," she said.

As his brain whirled it almost cast out the collocations: "Of course!" "I am so sorry!" and the bathos of it twisted his features into a grin that was as like a smile as a mask is like the human face; but Mrs. Cutting fell back in horror.

"You — you — was it not enough to kill her, without laughing —"

"Good God, how can you say such a thing? I feel as hysterical as a woman. How else could I feel? I am distracted, half out of my mind with horror and remorse. Give me credit for that much at least."

tried to forget, like a man who dreams yet believes himself to be awake.

Mabel spoke in a small distant voice. "I am dying and you have killed me."

"I am afraid I have."

"That is all I have left — that you should know that. Had I been happy I might have pulled through, although I had a horrible time, a horrible time! But my brain, all my blood, was on fire. I don't know — the doctor will explain — but I do know that my only chance was mental peace, and I was like a mad creature from the moment I learned you had gone to that woman. O God! I am only nineteen. What was I born for?"

She paused a moment and he stared at her with blanched face and mouth slightly open. His expression was almost vacant, his remarkably receptive faculty exercising itself unconsciously. To Mabel he looked as young as when she had first known him, and her expression softened, but only for a moment. Her face set again, and she went on:

"I don't mind dying so much, for I am so tired I don't care, and there is nothing left to live for. Even the baby deserted me. But I have lost — lost! And I was so sure I should win! Why should I not have been confident? I had had everything — always — it is so strange that I should be ground to powder! I feel as if the huge wheels of one of those old Roman chariots — conquerors' chariots! — had crushed me. I was a real little queen, and now I am nothing! nothing! And only nineteen! Why was I born?"

She raised herself on her hands; her immense hollow eyes, which had wandered during her last words, focussed, were piercing for the first time, probably, since they had met the light. "I think I should not mind even that — anything —" she was whispering, her voice almost dead — "if I could only have understood you. But to have been your wife, to have loved you so, and to die knowing that not for one minute, not for one second — and even death gives me no insight —"

He fled from the room as she fell back. The doctor, a

nurse, and Mrs. Cutting, were waiting on the threshold. He went hastily to his own room, and as he closed the door he felt something at his heels. It was LaLa, and he took him in his arms and sat without moving, almost without thought, for an hour. At the end of that time there was a tap and he admitted Mrs. Cutting. As he saw her face he braced himself and all sense of unreality left him. Her cherished but never harnessed youth had deserted her. Her face was pinched and yellow and old. Her hair was streaked with white. Her lips were gray and shaking. But even in her deep maternal grief, in the one violent blow that life had dealt her, even in her new hatred of this royal child of fortune, she was unable to undam her soul and overwhelm him with a fury of scorn and hatred, as she had dimly imagined she should do when she left Mabel's room for his. She could suffer, but not for her were the great tragic emotions, the splendours, the lightning blasts of expression. As she disciplined her relaxed mouth and pressed her hand hard against her bosom, Ordham's mind vagrantly recalled an observation of Styr's regarding the best of the American actors: that they managed to convey the impression of deep intense emotion, artistically repressed; when as a matter of fact they had nothing to repress. But that the poor woman suffered to the full capacity of her meagre nature he could not doubt, and he tried to take her hand and lead her to a chair. But she, like her daughter, thrust him away.

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"You — you — was it not enough to kill her, without laughing —"

"Good God, how can you say such a thing? I feel as hysterical as a woman. How else could I feel? I am distracted, half out of my mind with horror and remorse. *Give me* credit for that much at least."

"You are still young enough to feel excited at being in the midst of a tragedy!" Mrs. Cutting spoke almost dryly. "But I doubt if you will long convince yourself that it is anything more. I hope this may be the last time I shall ever be obliged to speak to you, and therefore I will say at once that I wish to take my child and her child to New York for interment. I don't think it necessary to give my reasons."

"You will do everything you wish, of course. I should not think of opposing you."

She stared at him in unwilling admiration in spite of her suffering, her indignation. He had mastered his excitement, and were he a kindly relative he could not be more courteous, more full of solicitude. She turned her back on him, thinking of nothing to say but "Thank you," and she left the room feeling like an honoured guest reluctantly dismissed.

But the next three days were a nightmare to Ordham. He was determined to pay all respect to Mabel dead, which, to do him justice, he had, with brief lapses, managed to pay her living. He even sat beside the bed for a few moments after they had dressed her and folded her hands, and filled her arms with lilies. She was less pinched, less shrunken, in death. A little of her beauty had returned to her, and she looked no more than sixteen. Again pity possessed him, and he left the room abruptly and wandered about the darkened house. For three days he barely went out, and as he could not settle himself to read, and as every blind, according to that depressing old provincial custom, was down, as the house seemed to grow more and more silent, darker and darker, until he thought he should go mad, he took refuge in the attic, where in an unused room he opened a back window, and, companioned by LaLa, who clung to him, sat gazing by the hour over the roofs, trying not to think of the future, but making no bones about wishing the present were over.

Then came the ordeal at which he had to appear as chief mourner; but he girded up his loins, and, as a matter of *fact, very nearly* wept as he followed the long narrow casket

ıt of the house. It was to remain in the mortuary chapel
Brompton Cemetery until Mrs. Cutting could close her
ɔuse and start for New York. There was another short
ervice out there, and as he was as white as death, and his
ıoulders sagged, the distinguished gathering, among
hom were many Americans, pitied him intensely.

LIX

WHEN ORDHAM WAS BRIDGMINSTER

BRIDGMINSTER was also dead; and on the day following Mabel's funeral, Ordham, in company with his mother and two of his brothers, started for Scotland to escort the body of the late head of their house to Ordham Castle and bury him in the vault beneath the village church with his fathers.

Ordham had endeavoured to forget Margarethe Styr until the last rites had been paid to his wife, but he sent her a telegram as he was leaving London, several from Scotland, and another as soon as he arrived at the castle. When his brother's funeral was over, his relatives departed, and he was quite alone — certain matters necessary of adjustment detained him at Ordham for a few days — he sat down to write a long impassioned letter to her. But his pen fell from his hand. For the first time in his life he could have written a great love-letter, abandoned himself recklessly in words; but he knew that if he made no mention of marriage, Styr, even if she received the letter in a state of mind absolutely responsive — by no means certain! — would notice the omission. She loved him as profoundly as a woman is capable of loving; the terrible confession by which she purposed to save him was proof enough of that; but she was also clear-sighted and practical. No subtlety of omission would ever deceive her, and all arguments against the public relation should come from her; that was her right. It was not that he had the least doubt she would continue to make these protests that held his pen, but the doubt of his own sincerity did he protest in black and white that he intended to

marry her. Not only did this woman still magnetize all the truth that was in him, but he knew that he could not make that particular protest as strong as the rest of his letter; she would detect the difference, and, with feminine inconsistency, be wounded to the quick.

And although he loved her the more for the pity that melted him every time he thought of that past she was forced to crowd out of her memory would she live at all, and admired her increasingly that she had risen to such triumphant heights of character and fortune above that Paphian ruin, he was appalled at the thought of introducing her into the line of mothers of the house of Ordham. If Mabel's boy had only lived! Or if he could be sure that Styr would have no children. But to have his possible sons and daughters cower from their fellows under the knowledge that their mother had been a woman of the streets—he was no longer young and indolent enough, careless and arrogant enough, to quaff his goblet to the dregs with no thought of the morrow.

If Styr had been one of the world's great singers for twenty years, that would be quite another matter. Ugly facts disappear into the alembic of Fame to emerge picturesque fiction. In course of time history would relate that one of the Countesses of Bridgminster had been a famous prima donna, her descendants would point with pride to her pictures by Lenbach and Sargent in the gallery of Ordham. But Munich was not the world, and although Styr had triumphed briefly in London, it was as a "discovery," not as a prima donna of established fame. Nor had she more than a year left in which to make a world-wide reputation, for she must leave the stage if she married him. He knew that he should win on this point, if he was able to overcome her scruples and marry her at all; but the result would be, as she well knew, an immediate—and fatally easy—disinterring of her past, a past which her brief and narrow career would by no means annul. And neither wealth nor abilities nor the great name he now bore would enable him to force his wife upon *those* circles which, representing their countries abroad,

are compelled to exercise, or simulate, a rigidity of convention which London and other great capitals can afford to disdain.

He tortured his mind for a restless day, roaming over the castle and the moors, but could think of no way out of the difficulty save to leave the problem to time. In any case, they could not marry for a year; two years would be more decent still. They might mutually agree to leave the question unopened for that length of time. During that period many things might happen; she might become so famous in the Anglo-Saxon world that, as is often the case, mere time would be annihilated by the dazzle of her reputation, — people would talk of her as if "they had known her always"; an experience which has its annoyances for those that resent having ten or twenty years added to their age, but not without its compensations. He, also, should be on his way toward establishment; for although it was not likely that any influence he could bring to bear would lessen the prescribed term of probation, those two years would give him opportunities to show his mettle, and he could rise rapidly enough thereafter. Yes, by degrees, the marriage might be accomplished, or it was possible they both might fear to disturb a relation in which they had found happiness; although it was his disposition to do all honour to the woman he loved, compensate her to the fullest degree for all she had been made to endure by malignant circumstances; and at the base of his nature was a love of order, of regularity. Like many another man, he might enter lightly enough into a liaison; but deliberately to contemplate one that should last the lifetime of himself and the woman for whom he felt all the refinements as well as the passions of love which a man generally reserves for his wife — it seemed to him an ugly and a grotesque jumble of contradictions. Better renounce diplomacy at once and seek usefulness in other ways. Moreover, he wanted her constant companionship.

But all this could not be written. It would look cold-blooded and calculating in black and white, a ridiculous *postscript to a love*-letter. When they were together

once more the subject would naturally be forgotten for a while; he could assume, without discussion, the future legalizing of their union, or profess that it was not worth talking about until the end of his period of public deference to the memory of his wife. He certainly would marry her if he discovered that she really wished it — but he trusted to time. Therefore he did not write, but telegraphed daily, intimating that the attempt to talk to her on paper made him sick and that he was bending all his energies toward hastening his departure. He did leave for London in less than a week, and there he found a long letter from Styr. She made no reference to her confession, nor to the death of his wife; but it was probably as passionate a love-letter as man ever received from woman, and it caused Ordham (as we may as well continue to call him during these remaining pages devoted to his youth) to ignore both the Foreign Office and his solicitors, and take the next train for the Continent.

LX

LIFE, THE POTTER

ORDHAM sat alone in the vast black auditorium of the Hof. Old Kurt had met him at the station with a note from Countess Tann which informed him briefly that the King had commanded a midnight performance of *Götter-dämmerung*, and that she had without difficulty bribed the doorkeeper to smuggle in the Englishman so favourably remembered; in these days there was little awe of the King's displeasure, but he must be careful to make no sound. "I shall sing to you, not to the King," the note concluded. "Do not forget that, but make no attempt to see me until to-morrow afternoon at one. It will be dawn before the performance finishes, and I shall be nothing but a worn-out prima donna with not a wish on earth but for supper and sleep. I shall hide in one of the hotels this evening and console myself by writing you a letter, which you will find at your hotel upon your return. Mind you tell Kurt where you are stopping."

Ordham raged at the further delay. But when he had worn his temper down with a long walk and a German supper, he began to feel agreeably alive to the adventure. At a quarter before midnight he presented himself at the side entrance of the Hof. The door was slightly ajar and opened upon his approach. Reënforcing the hand held out to him in the darkness, he tiptoed through the vestibule and foyer, then, left inside a door near the middle of the *parkett*, he fumbled unaided to a seat.

The orchestra was tuning and covered what sound he made. The jets of light above the scores of its musicians, and the solitary globe in the box of the King were all that

relieved the black vacuum in which he found himself. He could not make out a feature of the familiar tiers which always formed a part of the mental picture of this graceful opera house when he fell to dreaming of it. Dowdy as many of the women might be, they made a brilliant scene in totality, and there were always familiar faces, particularly in the *balkon*. And all were music lovers, come to hear, not to be seen, hardly daring to breathe audibly until the curtain went down. To-night, Ordham could have sworn the galleries were full of ghosts, so difficult was it to believe that he was to hear a performance of *Götterdämmerung* in an empty house. He turned his head, whimsically expectant of seeing the space behind the *parkettsitz* crowded with shadowy forms: the students, men and women, who felt themselves fortunate in being able to pay for standing room, and to stand for five hours!

And since he was forced to put an extinguisher on the lover in him until the morrow and had finished cursing the King, he gave his fancy rein and found it no effort to imagine himself in some vast underground cavern watching restless spirits bearing each a tiny torch at the entrance, and a throne cut in the rock behind him high up toward the dome. In truth the air in which he sat was damp and cold, although the month was August; the opera house had been closed since the first of July.

His mind indulged in fantasies but for a few moments however, presently returning to Styr's note. He had read it twice and wished he might strike a match and read it again. Something in it had induced a vague sensation of uneasiness, of doubt. In spite of her assurance that she should sing to him alone, it had been abrupt, almost cold. She might be wise in refusing to see him before the performance; but at least she could have written something of the regret she might reasonably be expected to feel; but this omission, no doubt, was due to the ill temper generally induced by these commands to sing at midnight. Then fear assailed him. Did she mean to convey some message of renunciation to-night? Prepare him for her decision in favour of art? He had never questioned that for this

great artist to renounce the stage at the height of her powers and in the dawn of a world-wide fame would be no light matter. In his breast pocket were the fiery vows he had received a few hours before his departure from London. There were no half measures about Styr; this letter had enveloped him in an electric mist. But her last note might have been written the summer before. Had she faltered when she received his last telegram from Cologne?—sternly admonished, perhaps, by that twin sister of hers in Valhalla, Brynhildr, whose temporary reincarnations, mayhap, it was that made Ludwig despise the women of Earth? . . .

Ordham felt his long jaw grow prognathic. Munich was not England. He forgot the death of his brother. He was in a romantic city, in a romantic adventure, he was youth on fire, man balked once more in his desire for the woman he loved with the strength of both youth and maturity. He vowed to own her in the uninterrupted possession of marriage if he had to blast the voice in her throat. He felt as primitive as the characters in the drama about to be presented, as he sat there, frowning, dogged, almost growling, in the cavernous darkness of that opera house which he has never set foot in since, nor ever will again.

The musicians stood up and faced about, standing in an attitude of extreme respect. Ordham turned his head. The King had entered his box. He still wore a light overcoat, as if he had but just now stepped from the carriage that brought him from one of his castles. He also did not think it worth while to remove his hat, a large soft hat, tipped over his heavy white face. Altogether he bore little resemblance to the romantic and brilliant youth, probably the handsomest figure that ever ornamented a throne, who had witnessed his first exclusive performance from that box in 1865. He sat down heavily. The musicians took their places. The overture began.

Ordham felt as if he had dropped gently from a fire-swept plain, haunted by furies, into a vast warm rhythmic sea whose tides swept sense to thought and rushed it back again to the senses, until that complete union was effected

of which all mortals dream but only the Ordhams and Styrs can attain.

Ordham never made any attempt to follow the motives in an overture; that was not his idea of enjoying music, which he estimated as a gift bestowed on brains like Wagner's that the intellect of the hearer might be awakened and excited only so far as was necessary to liberate the senses. Nevertheless, to-night he was aware as never before of that deep undertone of fate below the solemn joy and halleluja of the music of *Götterdämmerung*. And fate was personified in the first dark scene, where the three grey Norns sat weaving their ropes and gloomily foretelling the death of gods too confident and ambitious. But when the hideous trio disappeared and Brünhilde and Siegfried came forth from the cave where they had passed their long honeymoon, it needed only Styr's first love notes, piercingly sweet, while her eyes deliberately sought the spot where she knew Ordham must be, to shake him from head to foot with the reassurance that whatever she might resolve in her cooler moments, love meant all to her that it had meant to this fallen goddess.

Styr may or may not have read the volumes of criticism devoted to the heroine of the Niebelungenlied, but it is probable that in any case she would have penetrated the mists of antiquity and seen the Brynhildr who reigned there, with her own eyes. In *Die Walküre* she made her alternately the jubilant sexless favourite of Wotan, shadowed subtly with her impending womanhood, and the goddess of aloof and immutable calm, Will personified, even when moved to pity. In *Götterdämmerung*, particularly of late, she had portrayed her as woman epitomized, arguing that all great women had the ichor of the goddess in their veins, and that primal woman was but the mother of a sex modified (sometimes) but not remade. In the last act of *Siegfried* her voice was wholly dramatic and expressed her delight at coming into her woman's inheritance in ecstatic cries, almost shouts, which were never to be forgotten by any that heard them, and stirred the primal inheritance in the veriest butterfly of the court. In this beautiful love scene

of *Götterdämmerung*, the last of the tetralogy, her voice was lyric, rich and round and full, as her voice must always be, but stripped of its darker quality; and while by no means angelic, a character with which she could invest it when portraying the virgin Elizabeth, was as sweet and clear and triumphant as if bent upon giving the final expression to the first love of woman alloyed with knowledge.

Ordham had heard her in the rôle many times, and he soon appreciated that she had never made as much of this scene as she did to-night, realized she meant to convey that Brynhildr, with some echo in her brain of her old gift of prophecy, took advantage of this last hour of happiness to gratify her woman's nature to the core. She was tender, ineffably so, doubtful, charming, full of fears, superbly passionate. Her great tones were like golden apples filled with the sharp delicious juices of her bridal memories; and she was the epitome of the helpmate, the apotheosis of exalted womanhood when she bade her man go forth and conquer new worlds, exercise his supreme gifts of strength and courage as a man should, instead of dallying too long in these flowery meadows of love. Ordham, watching her through his glass, wondered that even she could be so beautiful, for her face was illuminated as he had never seen it before. He had not the least doubt that she kept her word and sang to him, and when she cried: "Oh, heavenly powers, holy protectors, view with delight our devotion and love. Apart, who can divide us? Divided, still we are one!" she bent her head from Siegfried's neck and looked once more full at the spot where, it may be, Ordham's face made a white blur on the dark.

He paid slight attention to the next scene, although the picturesque hall of the Gibichungs on the Rhine, with the sinister plot hatched there, had always delighted him; but his uneasiness recurred, for in retrospect Styr's voice and acting were charged with a significance he felt but could not define. His confidence returned, however, during her scene with Waltraute, when he could not doubt that her incredulity at the demand of the gods to give up her bridal ring, and the magnificent scorn with which she

announced herself woman, not that pitiful half-remembered thing, a demigoddess, were addressed, not to Valhalla, but to the harrowing demands of an art that still fought for its rights.

"Siegfried loves me! . . . The ring bides with me. . . . get hence to the gods. . . . Sooner to ruins Valhalla's splendour may crash," sang Brünhilde, much as Styr, if too hard pressed, might have cried: "To the devil with Art and the world!"

Ordham smiled, then sank the man in the spectator once more as the hapless Brünhilde repulsed and struggled with the disguised and unmemorized Siegfried, for here there could be no message; no mortal would ever come between himself and her; and perhaps that profound knowledge and faith, at the same time devoid of the subtle sting of regret for the loss of a suspense always piquant, was the final proof that, whatever his faults and lacks, as a man he was at least able to love greatly.

As Brünhilde was driven by the fraudulent Gunther into the cave, she looked as if the very bones had gone out of her, primitive woman beaten and captured by the victorious male, bewildered, helpless, sick with disgust and horror, but too broken, too conscious of the futility of revolt even to appeal to the relentless brute force behind her. Ordham recalled Styr's initiation, and reflected that, although methods had changed since the primordial era, man had not. And while there was no resemblance whatever between himself and that prosaic seducer of an ignorant and beautiful child, bred in a filthy mining town, save in their common sex, still would he, impelled by that imperious call in his blood of man for his mate, have resorted to kidnapping, strategy, bribery, violence, any device old or new, to force this woman into an indissoluble bond with himself.

By the King's command, there was a pause of but three minutes between the first act — close upon an hour and a half in length — and the second. Ordham's mind wandered to the morrow until the boat came down the Rhine with Gunther and his prey. Then, once more he was ready to *sink* Styr in Brünhilde, for he had never been able to de-

cide which was the greatest piece of acting on the world's stage, Styr's Isolde in the first act of *Tristan*, or her Brünhilde in this tremendous scene, where she invoked the supernormal birthright of the goddess to intensify the fury and indignation of the outraged woman.

As she stepped from the boat, hanging her head before the throng awaiting the bride Gunther had ravished from the fire-girt rock, she looked so forlorn, so beaten, so wholly womanly that Ordham felt tears in his eyes. Oddly enough his thoughts flew to the lonely coffin in Brompton Cemetery. Mabel, dead in her youth, was mercifully spared the maturer suffering of woman. Not that she ever could have reached the heights and depths so fatally accessible to this woman, but she symbolized youth, whose unhappiness is but a phase of its egotistical pleasures, and was gone before she had lived long enough to suffer with a mind stripped of illusions.

There was no controversy of doubt over Styr's interpretation of Brünhilde in this act. She let loose every passion of which her sex when scorned has yet conceived. After her vain appeal to Siegfried, standing fatuously beside the Gedrun whose magic potion has bewitched him (more than ever Ordham wondered that Brünhilde could have given her affections to this great child), when those long moments of staring incredulity were over, she burst into such a madness of rage that her voice seemed to darken visibly, to take on strange tones, as deep and crude as colour may have been in that morning of the world when goddesses went to sleep on rocks surrounded by fire and Siegfrieds fought dragons and walked through flames protected by *tarnhelm* and ring. When she screamed, her voice pierced to the marrow, affrighting as that of a wild beast in a jungle at night. The whole scene was almost unbearable in its intensity; but never did those beautiful arms make an ungraceful movement, the hand that clutched the heart as if to tear it out never rose an inch too high or low. Her audience might be racked and unbreathed, but Styr was always the absolute artist, vivified but never distracted by the furnace within.

Nevertheless, those that knew nothing of acting would have vowed that Styr's brain was suffocated by Brynhildr's. To-night when Siegfried and Gedrun had gone, and, alone with Gunther and Hagen, she stood staring before her, an immense horror in her eyes, her lips slightly parted, her arms limp, as if on the edge of the world watching it sink into the black void of space, Ordham involuntarily glanced behind him at the King. He had hitched his chair forward, his arms were pressing the rail, his hat was on the back of his head, his eyes flamed with light. He looked like a lost immortal, long straying from star to star, who at last sees the distant gates of Valhalla open, and awaiting him. Ordham wondered why this poor idealist had never sought out Styr, hoping to find in her the embodiment of his unearthly dreams; wondered again if it were because of the knowledge that his mortal career had made it impossible for him to find the goddess in any woman. His eyes were filmed with more than common weakness, his senses drugged, dead; he could but dream of some tier of heaven reserved for great souls like his, which came to their own only when free of the flesh. But there was no doubt that Styr in such scenes as this gave him immortal moments.

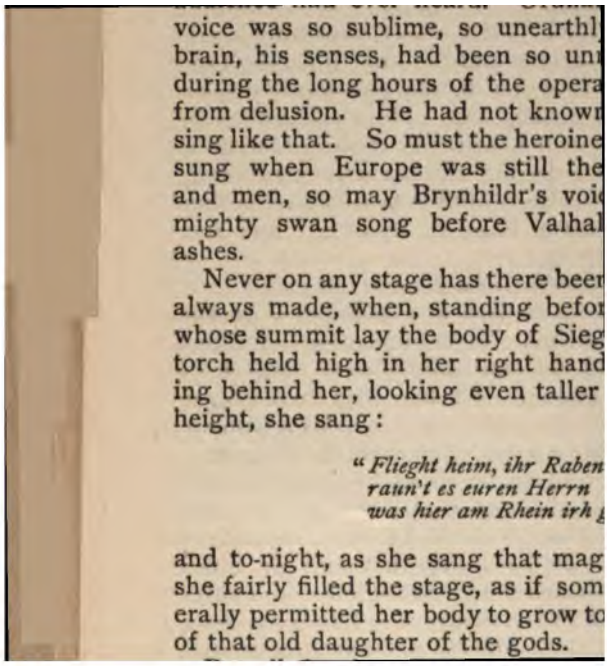
Brünhilde came out of her stupor, and after a fruitless lament for the lost arts of her godhood, with which, womanlike, she fancied she might have held Siegfried against the wiles of a younger woman, deliberately sentenced him to death. As she described the only vulnerable part of the mighty Siegfried, that fearless back which he would never show to any foe, her calm was far more awful than her wrath had been. During her long meditation, she had divined the trick which had been played upon the warrior, but that light by no means mitigated the evil; if she could not possess him neither should Gedrun. It was the primitive woman's method of revenge that modern woman has not disdained to follow, but so grand was her portrayal of a woman conscious that she had once been the mighty daughter of Wotan, that never for a second did she descend to the level of Earthians. She was Brünhilde acting according to her lights, and the lights of her day must have

been as blinding as an electric storm caught in an underground cavern.

The scene shifted. Siegfried drank from the horn into which the ever malignant Hagen had squeezed the restorative herb, and sang of Brünhilde, forgetting Gedrun and all that had happened since he left the rock. With the enchanting strains of the love music of the last act of the third opera of the tetralogy embracing him — tender and ecstatic — followed by the slowly unwinding Brünhilde motif, coming as it did after so much misery, wickedness, and violence, and preceding crime and the final disaster, Ordham dropped his face into his hands and gave up his thoughts to the bliss he anticipated. He was recalled by the deepest sigh he had ever heard. It came down upon him like a gust of death, dulling the almost excruciating sweetness of the music. He raised his head and thanked God that he was not Ludwig, King of Bavaria. For him there was a future on Earth.

The *Trauermarsch*, in which all the dead of not only Earth, but of the Universe, seem to rise and tramp across the bridge of oblivion, was finished. Brünhilde entered the hall of the Gibichungs to find Gedrun wailing over Siegfried's body, Gunther slain by Hagen. Of late Styr had played the character consistently through to the end as a woman. But to-night she appeared to defer once more to Wagner — possibly to the King — and to be about to symbolize the "negation of the will to live," the eternal sacrifice of woman, the immolation of self; although she had contended, and for that reason sang no more at Bayreuth, that such an interpretation was absurd as a finale for Brünhilde, no matter what its beauty and truth in the abstract. The gods were doomed, her renouncement of life did not save them, and as for the sacrifice of woman to man, that she had accomished twice over. Brünhilde died as other women had ed since, and doubtless before, in the hope of uniting th the spirit of her man, and because life was become horrent.

To-night, as she entered the hall, she was so still, so mastic, that she no longer looked a woman at all, save in so



voice was so sublime, so unearthl
brain, his senses, had been so uni
during the long hours of the opera
from delusion. He had not known
sing like that. So must the heroine
sung when Europe was still the
and men, so may Brynhildr's voi
mighty swan song before Valhal
ashes.

Never on any stage has there beer
always made, when, standing befor
whose summit lay the body of Sieg
torch held high in her right hand
ing behind her, looking even taller
height, she sang:

"*Flieght heim, ihr Raben*
raun't es euren Herrn
was hier am Rhein irh

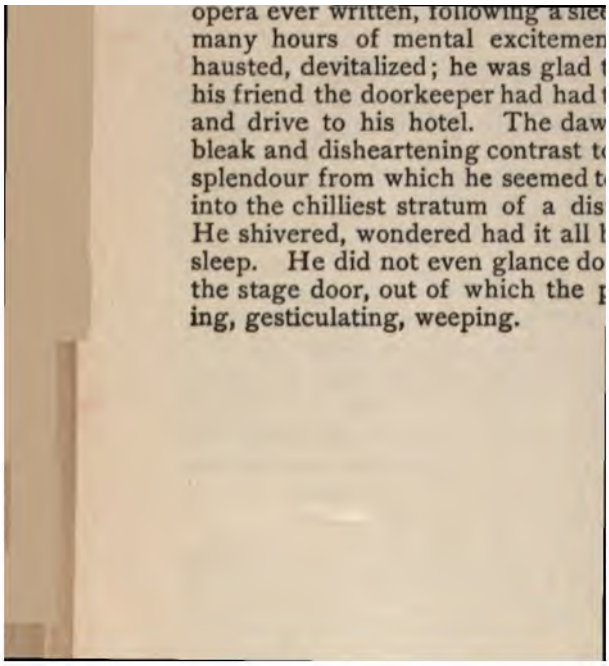
and to-night, as she sang that mag
she fairly filled the stage, as if som
erally permitted her body to grow to
of that old daughter of the gods.

"Fühl' meine Brust auch,
wie sie entbrennt;
helles Feuer
das Hertz mir erfasst,
ihn zu umschlingen,
umschlossen von ihm,
in mächtigster Minne
vermählt ihm zu sein!
Heiaho! Grane!
grüsse deinem Herrn!
Siegfried! Siegfried! Sieh!
Selig grüsst dich dein Weib!"

The last line was flung straight into Ordham's ear, but he did not pause to reflect upon its significance, holding his breath for this final moment of Styr's stupendous acting, Brynhildr's immolation. She leaped on her horse, and with head erect and arms uplifted to the smouldering body on the pyre, dashed straight into the flames. It was over in a second, but its realism was so intense and affrighting, that, as ever, Ordham gasped and nearly sprang from his seat, while the King gave a loud shout of rapture.

Ordham sank back with a deep sigh of amused relief. He knew that those flames produced by spirits did not really meet, and that Styr's horse was too well trained to make a misstep or linger. Still no one else save Vogel had ever essayed this feat, which could be simulated on the darkened stage, and overlooked in the simultaneous conflagration of the castle, the rise of the waters of the Rhine, the vision in the sky of Valhalla in flames.

The walls began to fall, Hagen and the Rhine maidens to search furiously for the ring, retainers to fly about in distraction. Ordham had never seen the confusion as well represented as to-night. The shrieks sounded genuine, the faces of the survivors were distraught. No doubt these born artists and loyal Bavarians were always afire when performing for their King alone. The curtain went down amidst the crash of orchestration. Ordham, seeing that the King's box was empty, slipped out, meditating upon those last words of Brünhilde. "Thy wife!" She had made her final decision, then, bade her farewell to the stage in that *long dirge*. It was indeed her swan song!



opera ever written, following a slee
many hours of mental excitemen
hausted, devitalized; he was glad t
his friend the doorkeeper had had t
and drive to his hotel. The daw
bleak and disheartening contrast t
splendour from which he seemed t
into the chilliest stratum of a dis
He shivered, wondered had it all b
sleep. He did not even glance do
the stage door, out of which the p
ing, gesticulating, weeping.

LXI

THEIR MARRIAGE

When Ordham reached his hotel he found old Kurt awaiting him with the promised letter. He dismissed him sleepily and when in his room laid it on the table beside his bed, intending to read it in the morning when he was in a more appreciative condition. But the preparations for bed roused him somewhat, and he suddenly opened the letter with the purpose of glancing at the first page, believing this message was designed to console him for the taciturn note she had sent to the station. But when he had read three lines he read on; and when he had finished the letter he read it again; and then once more.

"After all, I find that I love you more than I love myself.

"Even could I exercise that power of will which has transformed me from one sort of woman into another during these last nine years of my life, and forced you to consent to see me no more, and even were I able to convince you for the moment that I acted in your interest alone, the time would come when you would resent the strength that enabled me to annihilate my happiness as well as your own; furthermore, the suspicion would be irresistible that art was the stronger passion after all. In time you would hate me, then grow indifferent, then forget. Now, you will love me always.

"In one's last hour one must be entirely truthful; it is possible that, if I renounced my beloved art, my great career, the time would come when I should regret; when I might, indeed, raven for that lost world of illusions of which those that never have entered it have no conception

tain before it, Art never abdicate
that time inevitably comes.

"On the other hand, I find my
I am not the born artist, deep
grasp of art on my mind and so
my temperament — its emotional
no doubt, by the fact that the
uncommonly lusty and highly
turned back upon themselves by
and horrors of those thirteen yea
unimpaired; rather were they rec
the channels of art the moment
I profoundly believe that no born
career — which is merely the insat
resident in her brain — for any
more than the temporary efferv
nature. To some accident of or
mechanical gift of a voice; my b
circumstances of my life, have ma
great artist. That I do not hat
dearest delusion that can possess
final proof of my all-embracing
I am Brynhildr, not that Marg
manufactured upon the ruins of

sooner or later pay the price. The bill has been presented to me later than I deserve — possibly because I had something to give the world — but at the precise moment when my all could be exacted in payment. Still, who shall say that I am not more fortunate than most? — I have my choice of retributions: to live and be your ruin, or to die while I can still live on in your heart, your unappalled imagination, forever. If I am not the absolute and inalienable artist I so fondly believed, at least I have not cultivated my soul and my brain to no purpose, and I do not believe that I really have hesitated a moment.

"Putting all other considerations aside, could I, after the life I led for thirteen long vile years, continue to exalt you above your sex? Those numberless ghosts would rise, sit at the banquet, claim you as their brother. And, alas that it should be so, it is only in dreams that men are not fatally alike!

"If when you read this you should conceive the mad thought of following me, please stop and reflect that by that act of cruelty you would make this sacrifice of mine — for I shall not pretend that I wish to leave this world — both foolish and useless. Therefore do you owe it to me to practise as your religion that promise you made me on Stanmore Heath, to live for the single purpose of developing to the utmost those great gifts for which I extinguish my own. And believe me when I assure you that in the constant exercise of great abilities, particularly when their performances are accompanied by the world's orchestra, there is much to console. It is, indeed, the next best thing to the heart's happiness; perhaps it should be given the first place, for as long as we are willing to exercise our gifts and our usefulness, so long are we masters of our fate. It is only the immortal happiness of mortal love that Life fears to give us lest we grow stronger than she.

"If I elect to die on the stage, it is not merely because I believe the stage to be the proper place for the final exit of those artists that have truly loved her, but because the stage of the Hof has been my best friend; on it I have

known the most triumphant, the most exalted, moments of my life. Bayreuth was my school, the London experience was an anti-climax, a tour de force; on this stage alone have I been really alive, profoundly happy. Therefore do I give her my last breath.

"I shall be, when I pass finally through the gate of that fool's paradise in which I have dwelt for the past eight years, a nameless woman, a waif of the coal pits, of the streets of New York. But I will not submit to have Margaret Hill engraved on my tombstone, for, however alloyed, in my veins there is a drop of golden blood. 'Countess Tann,' would make the gods on their thrones rock with mirth, and in time the world would hear and laugh too, and this beloved Bavaria, which has shown me surpassing kindness, would be put to shame. Therefore have I ordered my body purified by fire and the ashes cast on the Isar. Then will it dwell with music forever.

"I bequeath you my Will.

"I dare not see you again.

"*Siegfried! Siegfried! Selig grüsst dich dein Weib!*"

LXII

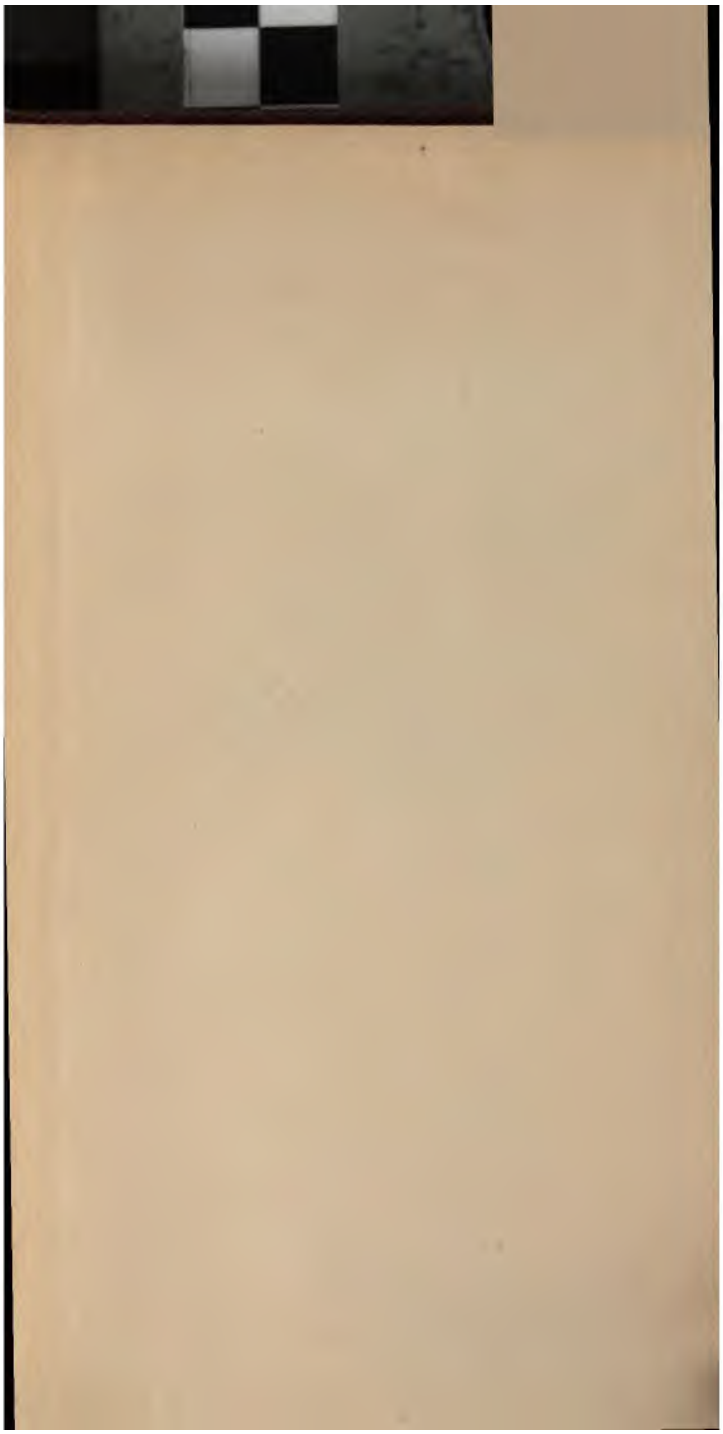
THE IVORY TOWER OF ORDHAM

BRIDGMINSTER'S manners are almost as famous as his diplomatic gifts and achievements. They are, indeed, so perfect, that many — notably the women that have tried to marry him — aver that he is composed wholly of charm and brain; that his heart, if ever he had one, is buried in the American grave of his young wife, whom he had the terrible misfortune to lose so soon after his romantic marriage. That dramatic finale of his youthful happiness occurred not so long since but that people still gossip about it, recall his desperate flight to the Continent immediately after the funeral of the divine Mabel, where he affected the company to tears by his manifest woe. No one was surprised to hear of his illness — brain fever? — in one of the British Legations — Munich? Rome? Constantinople? He has such a vast connection, and details will slip from the best of memories.

When quite well again, however, he threw himself into work with an ardour! In the course of three or four years, between those gifts the good Lord had showered upon him, an industry at which his family has not ceased to marvel, and the influence he was able to command, his advancement in the diplomatic service was uncommonly rapid. He has gone on rising ever since, not alone in the service, but in the estimation of Europe, whose attention he has challenged more than once, and in a manner which assures him a place in history.

Princess Nachmeister died quite satisfied with him.

No man in Europe is more gay, more brilliant, more constantly in society. He looks, say those so fond of dis-



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